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NIGEL LENNOX

OF GLEN IRVINE







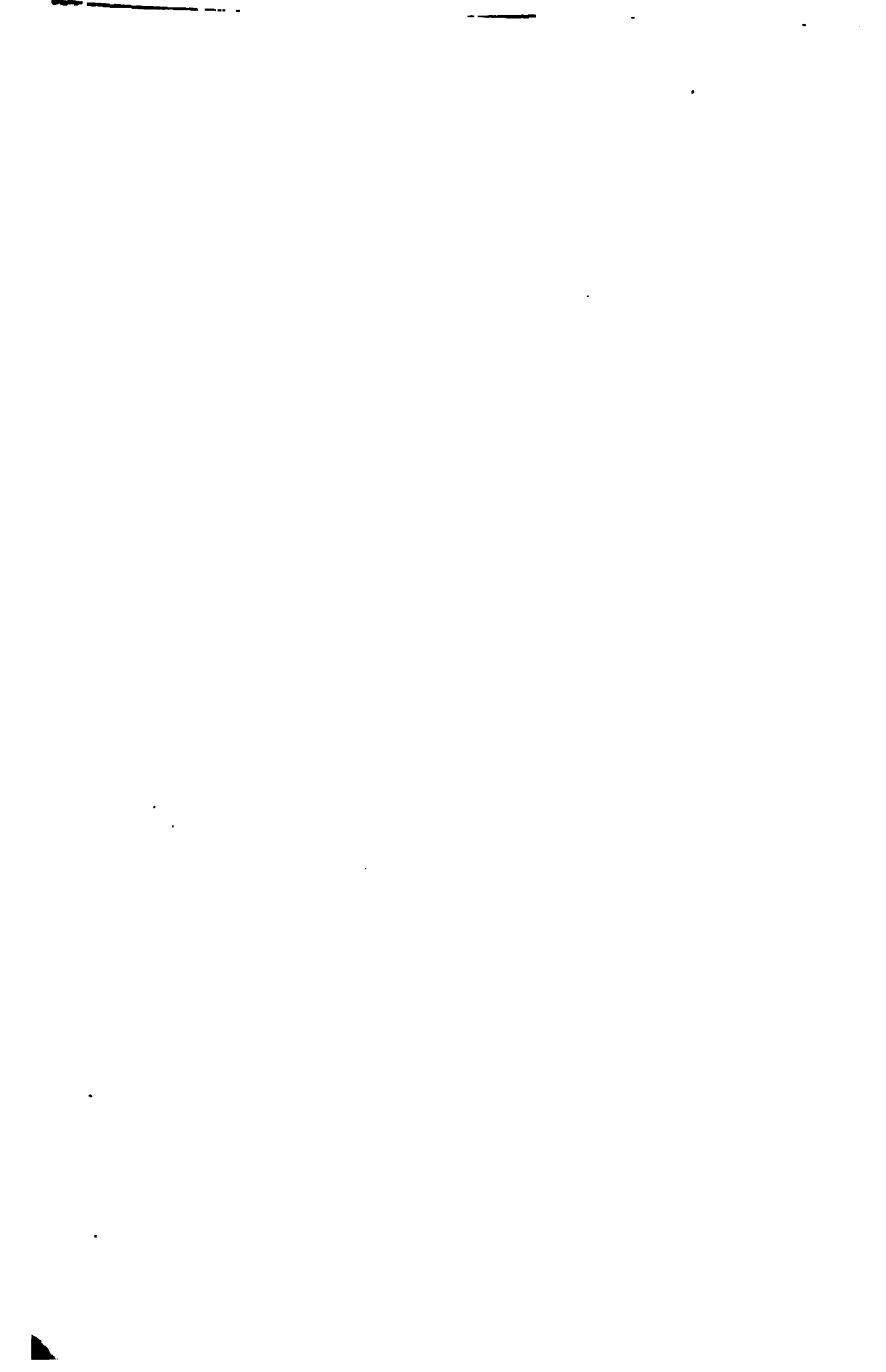




FRONTISPIECE.

[See page 169]

256 e. 1656. —



NIGEL LENNOX OF GLEN IRVINE.

BY
L. N. HYDER.

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS.

London:
HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCCLXXXV.

256 e. 1656. —



CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MRS. LANGHORNE'S APPREHENSIONS . . .	1
II. THE SURGERY ATTIC	8
III. FROM CHILDHOOD TO WOMANHOOD . . .	23
IV. THE KING OF BRICKS AND MORTAR . . .	37
V. MR. LENNOX AND HIS SECRETARY . . .	55
VI. ANGELS AND ASSES	68
VII. SEEN BY OTHER LIGHTS	80
VIII. AMONG THE PICTURES	92
IX. AT GLEN IRVINE	107
X. MRS. CHEYNE'S TEA-TABLE	121
XI. MR. CHEYNE WASTES AN OPPORTUNITY . . .	137
XII. LUX LUCET IN TENEBRIS	146
XIII. NORTHWARD HO!	154
XIV. A PLEASANT SURPRISE	167
XV. THE SPANISH ROOM	179
XVI. MRS. LENNOX	186
XVII. A STORY OF BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS .	195
XVIII. BAUCIS AND PHILEMON	210

CHAP.	PAGE
XIX. SPECIMENS OF CHARACTER	217
XX. BETWEEN TWO BISHOPS	232
XXI. THE SCHOOL-TREAT	242
XXII. CONFIDENCES	253
XXIII. BY THE LIGHT OF A LANTERN	262
XXIV. DAISY'S PRESENT	278
XXV. JOCK'S COMFORTER	290
XXVI. IN THE BIRKEN GLEN	300
XXVII. WILL'S NEWS	317
XXVIII. JOCK DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF	329
XXIX. AGATHOS	346

CHAPTER I.

MRS. LANGHORNE'S APPREHENSIONS.

A GREAT noisy, grimy, prosaic-looking place, situated in the most unpicturesque part of the Midland counties—such was the town of Stockhampton, in which Richard Langhorne had made his money.

Like most of his fellow-citizens, he had, as the saying is, made it in business. The son of a respectable retail tradesman, he had given up the shop at his father's death and gone into a wholesale concern (not quite without an eye to gaining the favour of a certain pretty Fanny Hastings, a country surgeon's daughter, who soon afterwards consented to marry him), in which he had been so far successful that he found himself at forty-five a fairly prosperous, if not a wealthy man, the owner of a large warehouse in Market Street, and of a suburban residence in the smart new district of Woodbury. Maple Bank, so Mr. Langhorne's home was called, was an imposing-looking edifice, standing a little back from the semi-rural Woodbury Road, with a gravelled enclosure in front and a good-sized garden behind. This garden had once formed part of an old

pleasance, and was a bowery, Arcadian-looking place when the Langhorne's first took the house; but the lilacs and laburnums that used to hang out their purple and gold pendants had been cut down to make room for a lawn-tennis court, and now the one remnant of its former glories, the large old hawthorn that with every recurrence of its namesake month became a dome of gowing crimson, was to be sacrificed that the grass-plot on which it grew might be laid out in geometrical flower-beds. Mrs. Langhorne's sister, Agatha, the only member of the family in whom anything of the artist was indigenous, had begged hard for its life, but had only obtained a reprieve till she should have taken its portrait in its glory. Within, the house was very much like others of its kind. It had a big drawing-room, gorgeous with yellow damask upholstery, marble-topped tables, and huge gilt-framed mirrors (æstheticism was not much in favour at Woodbury); a solemn-looking dining-room hung with the family portraits—Mr. Langhorne, Mrs. Langhorne, their three children, and Mrs. Langhorne's father, the medical man. A badly-executed effigy of Mr. Langhorne senior had long since been removed to a dark upstairs landing; its place having been filled up by the likeness of an antiquated gentleman in a powdered wig and snuff-coloured coat, purchased at a sale, and supposed by the uninitiated to represent one of Mrs. Langhorne's ancestors. There was also a library, appropriately furnished but seldom used, for the Langhorne's were not a bookish family; and a snug, cosy morning-room,

in which the lady of the house and her daughter Blanche were generally to be found.

In this morning-room, one afternoon in May, Mrs. Langhorne sat writing her regulation monthly letter to her sister Jane, who was the wife of a civil servant in India. Her pen moved rapidly, for she knew that Jane liked a minute account of all that went on at Maple Bank, and the news-budget this month was more than usually full.

"We are expecting a distinguished visitor next Tuesday" (she wrote)—"no less a personage than the millionaire Nigel Lennox, of the great building firm of Lennox & Mortis—the Great Contractor he is sometimes called. Richard and I met him at a dinner-party when we were in London the other day, and to our astonishment he made the discovery that he was related to us. It seems that Richard's mother was a cousin of Mr. L.'s father; she died, you know, when Richard was a mere child, and he knew very little of her antecedents except that she was Scotch and had been a governess in some family near Stockhampton. He was most friendly, and invited us to dine with him; he has one of the new Queen Anne's mansions at South Kensington furnished all in the fashionable style, and such beautiful paintings in every room! besides a place near Glasgow and an old feudal castle in some wild part of Scotland that he purchased and rebuilt a few years ago, just after he retired from the active business of the firm—and he seemed quite pleased when Richard suggested that he should spend

a few days with us on his way to the north next week. It is rather a serious undertaking, to entertain a millionaire; happily Mr. Lennox is one of those jovial, good-natured individuals who can make themselves at home in any society, from the highest to the lowest, and his wealth gives him the *entrée* to the former though he is quite an uncultivated person. (Is not the mammon worship of our day something fearful, my dear Jane, when a man of such thoroughly plebeian origin—I believe his father was a sort of peasant farmer—can be received as a friend into houses where the country squires about Swanborough, who disdained to notice our poor dear father except in his professional capacity, would have been only too thankful to gain admission?) Of course, as we are his own relations, and the only ones he has besides his sister and her family, it is but right and proper for us to show him a little attention.

“The only thing I am afraid of is a collision between him and Agatha. You know how fastidious she is, and how little interest she ever takes in any one who is not either intellectual enough to come up to her standard or ignorant and degraded enough to require a special mission. She will certainly be disgusted with his broad Scotch and rough-and-ready manners,—he is very likely to slap her on the shoulder or call her by her Christian name,—and I fear will let him see that she is so, which is just what he will take most amiss. From a child, you will remember, Agatha never could take a joke, and even now she often looks quite black at my poor Foxie’s harmless

chaffing. However, I must make the best of her to old Nigel; from what we hear of him he will appreciate her philanthropic fads at any rate, and they will help to cover her eccentricity. I only wish I could get her out of the way while he is here; I could then give him her two rooms as bed and dressing-room. She occupies the large back room upstairs, with the little octagon-shaped one leading out of it; and since she has had them panelled in oak, with new furniture to match, they look quite artistic, and would be just to his taste—an odd one enough for such an uneducated man. I suggested that it would be a nice time for her to go up and see the Royal Academy as she did last year, telling her that she would lose nothing by missing Mr. Lennox's visit, but no! she says 'it isn't convenient' (I wonder when it *is* convenient for Agatha to do anything we want her to); she has double work at the hospital just now (just as if she was bound to go there), and a string of equally cogent reasons. Of course, as she contributes her share to our household expenses, and I will say very liberally, I could not actually hint that I wanted her out of the house. If she had arranged to go, I should have taken the liberty of removing some of the ridiculous high-flown mottoes she has hung on her walls, especially her last achievement in that line, which is an illuminated quotation, placed under a scene from Don Quixote, to the effect that it is better to tilt at any number of windmills than to leave one real wrong unchallenged! I should be

very sorry for such a sensible, practical man as Nigel Lennox to suppose that any member of our family was harebrained enough to set up Don Quixote as a model.

"If Agatha had been like any one else I would have asked her if she would mind changing her room for the time; but we know her better than that, don't we, Jane? For a struggling curate or penniless artist I daresay she would have turned out with pleasure, but—ah! well, I should get some nice agreeable hits about toadying to wealth if I were to propose it in *this* case. Richard means to tell her plainly that he will stand no nonsense, and that she must be civil to his cousin and do her part to render his visit agreeable to him; it is not every day one gets the chance of making such a friend for one's children, and it would be a most culpable thing in us, as my husband says, not to use the opportunity.

"I don't think I told you that the King of Bricks and Mortar, as Fox calls him, is a widower. Don't imagine that I have designs upon him for Blanche—he is a *little* bit too elderly for her, nearly sixty I should say, and, besides, I fancy Blanchie has other views. Bertrand Puttick has been very attentive lately. You may remember when you were here noticing Puttick's monster cheese warehouse in Guild Street. The old man is Sir Samuel now (how dreadfully common knighthood has become! I should never care for Richard to be knighted), and they have taken a country seat ten miles off (Foxie says they were

determined to be out of reach of the smell of the cheese), called Daynscot, where they imagine themselves county people. The parents are just what you might expect, of course,—that is the worst of living in a place like this; the people one has to know are all in trade,—but the sons and daughters are quite presentable, and great cronies of my young folks. Bertrand is the eldest son, and he comes of age on Friday week, when there are to be grand doings at Daynscot, a *fête* in the style of the fifteenth century, with tilting at the quintain, dancing round the May-pole, and other old English sports. Rather incongruous, isn't it? However, the Woodbury young people are all looking forward to it with great glee, mine among the number. Happily for us this new edition of the 'Fortunes of Nigel'—another of my comical boy's names for our coming visitor—is to take his departure on Friday morning, so we shall be able to start for Daynscot as soon as we have seen him off.

* * * * *

"And now, dear Jane, with much love, etc., etc.,

"I remain,

"Your affectionate sister,

"FANNY LANGHORNE."

CHAPTER II.

THE SURGERY ATTIC.

WE have seen in what sort of estimation Agatha Hastings was held in her sister's house. In the town of Stockhampton she was known as a zealous promoter of philanthropic efforts of various kinds, and also as the authoress of several tales, magazine articles, etc., which had, from their thoughtful and elevating tone, gained her an honourable place in the world of women writers. She was a slight, pale, dark-eyed woman, not in the least resembling her fair, smooth-faced sister; those who admired her most thought her interesting looking rather than pretty; yet now and then, when some unwonted emotion had brought the fire to her eye and the rich crimson glow to her cheek, she had even been called beautiful.

While Mrs. Langhorne had been writing, Miss Hastings had come in from an afternoon's work in her district, and was now standing by the octagon-shaped oak table in her own sitting-room, looking wistfully down at a brown leather portfolio, ink-stained and battered, which lay upon it, a relic of the past, stuffed with the effusions of her childish genius, which



STRANGELY FAMILIAR THEY SEEMED.

[Page 9.]

she had come upon that morning in a long unopened box. The cuckoo clock on the wall chimed half-past six, and she gave a little sigh of relief at the thought that she might indulge in a quarter of an hour's *dolce far niente*, before it would be time to dress for dinner, for she felt fagged after her long walk from the heart of the city ; and sitting down in a low chair she took the old portfolio on her lap, and began to examine its contents. Strangely familiar they seemed, though it was nearly thirty years since it had first been made over to her, half worn out even then, by her father, who had only cast it aside on being presented with a new one by a grateful patient ; and she smiled as she remembered her delight at receiving it, and the pride she had taken in those closely-scribbled pages of manuscript, which she drew one after another from its ample pockets. Laughable enough productions they appeared to her now, these unformed buddings and excrescences of that *cacoëthes scribendi* which had since borne worthy fruit ; queer little poems or scraps of poems, for some of them were mere *torsi* having neither beginning nor end, and fancifully-conceived tales and allegories, not devoid of talent of a crude sort. There were drawings too, some of them reproductions from memory of pictures she had once seen and been impressed by ; others original designs of illustrations for her own works, or those of more distinguished authors, several sketches being often set down in picturesque confusion on the same sheet of cartridge paper, with the title of each subject

appended. She took one up at random, and recognized in one corner Thekla weeping over the grave of Max, in another the Lady of Shalott floating down the stream in her boat of doom, in a third a band of Vikings setting sail in their sea-dragons, and in the fourth a very "free" reminiscence of Millais' "Autumn Leaves," while in the centre stood a mailed heroine, whose identity seemed to have been for a time a matter of doubt to the little artist, who after writing down and crossing out Clorinda and Boadicea, had finally dubbed her Britomart. As she turned them over one after another, Agatha Hastings forgot the present and floated back on the magical carpet of Memory, the perennial enchanter, to the old brick house in the sleepy little High Street of Swanborough, and heard once more the shouts of the crew of sturdy rosy-cheeked children that romped about its stairs and passages, and never wearied of teasing the sensitive, imaginative little sister who seemed to have been dropped in among them by a mistake, so widely did she differ from the family type.

Poor little Agatha! Like the Ugly Duckling, she had met with but scant appreciation in the home-nest. While her mother, a gentle, delicate woman, lived, she had always had some one to pet and make much of her, some one who was never tired of listening to her babble of knights and heroes, fairies and wizards, but Mrs. Hastings had been taken from her eight children when Agatha, the youngest but two, was only seven years old, and thenceforth she had been as one by herself in

that large household ; for, as has been well said, it is not the presence of bodies, but of souls, that makes company. Her father, a man without a spark of ideality in his nature, and accustomed in his calling as parish doctor to see all the most commonplace and prosaic aspects of life, looked upon her as a poor sentimental little creature who would never be of much use in the world, and this opinion was shared by his eldest daughter Sarah, an eminently sober-minded and practical young woman, who, according to the Swanborough ladies, was a much more efficient manager of the house and children than her mother—"a pining, useless sort of person," they had often contemptuously styled her—had been. She did not mean to be unkind, but there was something unnatural, and therefore objectionable, to her in a little girl who was indifferent to dolls, and who was for ever poring over a book, generally one far above her years ; and she thought she was only doing her duty in perpetually snubbing the child, and allowing the others unlimited license to make fun of her.

One day, for instance, thrilled to the very soul by a noble stanza from some great poet, Agatha had almost involuntarily spoken the lines aloud in the presence of her special tormentors Sam and Fanny, only to have them echoed in a burst of mocking gibberish. Sweet-tempered enough generally, this was more than the poor child could stand, and she retorted with indignant words mingled with passionate tears, the sound of which brought Sarah, who happened to

be within earshot, upon the scene, to administer a sharp rebuke, not to the real culprits, but to their victim for her inability to take a harmless joke, winding up with the prognostication that if Agatha continued to be so peculiar she would most likely end her days in a lunatic asylum. Awed by this terrible prospect, Agatha thenceforth schooled herself to "take" all jokes with Spartan equanimity, but she kept more than ever aloof from the other children, and sought every opportunity of slipping away to some corner, where she could forget her troubles in the pages of a story, or better still in committing to paper a romance of her own weaving.

She was a strange child, no doubt, but a little sympathy and forbearance would have made her less so, and brought her nearer to Sarah's ideal of "being like other people"; a little affection would have won her to mingle more with her brothers and sisters, and find pleasure in their games; and she often wondered sadly why they should be so intolerant of her hobbies, when she never felt the smallest inclination to interfere with theirs.

Agatha had been from the time she first learnt to read, which was farther back than she could remember, an insatiable devourer of books, and her great trouble was that there were not more of them available to her; for she had gone through all that the house contained, with the exception of a few which were prohibited by Sarah as "not fit for little girls" at a very early age. When she was twelve years

old, however, a stroke of singularly good fortune befell her. She had gone one day to see an elderly woman, who had been her nurse when she was a young child, and who had now retired on her savings to a trim cottage in the outskirts of the town, and having been left alone for a few minutes in the smart little parlour, the young lady noticed that the bookshelves, hitherto empty, were now stocked with books, and books, too, of the kind she most appreciated—standard works of poetry, history, and fiction. The sight of them acted upon her like a magnet, first drawing her towards the bookcase, then moving her to take down a volume at random and dip into its contents. It happened to be a translation of Schiller's Plays, and when Mrs. Goodman returned she found Agatha standing in the middle of the room, deep in *The Piccolomini*.

"Ah! you're at the books, missy. You were always a rare one for reading; but those are not mine, they belong to Miss Clarice North."

"Clarice North?" repeated Agatha, thinking how pretty and romantic the name sounded, and concluding that its owner must be so likewise.

"Yes; the first young lady I ever had the care of, and the dearest and the sweetest!" rejoined Mrs. Goodman warmly. "Always fond of her old 'Goody,' like you, Miss Agatha. She sent for me to meet her at Stockhampton last week, and she said she'd come and lodge with me for a bit, having no settled home, and I brought down a box of her books to set out

ready against she arrived ; for she's as much set upon books as you are, missy. But deary me!—she isn't coming after all, for her brother, Mr. Walter, is took ill, and she's forced to go with him to foreign parts. But she's written to me to keep the books till she returns to England—whenever that may be."

" Oh ! Goody, could you lend me one ? " exclaimed Agatha.

Goody looked doubtful, said she must consider, and finally decided that " she didn't think Miss Clarice would mind, for she was always more than willing to lend her books, that she was ! " On hearing which Agatha inwardly if not outwardly, for she was not a demonstrative child, clapped her hands for joy.

For the next two years, whatever troubles Agatha had, she never wanted a book to read. She was somewhat perplexed at first to find a place in which she could enjoy her treasures secure from disturbance by the children and from the scrutiny of Sarah, who was very likely to condemn them as " not fit for little girls to read," a distinction of which poor Mrs. Goodman, who could just manage to spell out a page in her large-print Testament, knew nothing ; but one day a bright idea flashed upon her—the surgery attic ! Dr. Hastings had fitted up as his surgery the lower room of a small two-storied building which was joined to the house by a long covered passage ; here he compounded pills and mixtures, and gave audience to his poorer patients, while the upper one, a mere attic in the roof, was used as a lumber-room, and rarely entered by any

of the household. It was not an inviting retreat. The whitewashed walls and ceiling were festooned with cobwebs; the one small window was seldom opened and still more seldom cleaned; there was a heap of broken furniture in one corner, and a great packing-case turned upside-down in another; while against the wall stood a pile of musty-looking books, chiefly medical works of ancient date, and a row of large blue glass bottles, the contents of which had long since, in various forms and combinations, gone down the throats of her father's patients. A faint physicky odour still lingered about them, while to complete the charms of the apartment there dangled from the cross-beam of the roof a skeleton, on which Dr. Hastings had once pursued anatomical reseaches. But Agatha was secure of privacy here, and that was the main point. Not that the skeleton had any terrors for the others—they were all too matter-of-fact for that; but their associations with the surgery were the reverse of pleasant, since they were never admitted into it except for the purpose of taking doses of medicine or undergoing still more obnoxious dental operations, on which account they shunned its precincts as much as possible, and more than ever since one day that their father, having caught the three boys listening behind the door to the cries of an unfortunate little parish patient having a gathered finger lanced, suddenly remembered that they were in need of a little physic, and ordering them forthwith into the chamber of horrors, administered a glass of "Gregary" all round.

Hither, then, Agatha betook herself with her book and her portfolio, which was now getting quite bulky with her "remains," as she called her MSS., having heard this term applied to the productions of authors; and many a blissful hour did she spend in that dingy garret, with the skeleton as her only companion—indeed, she grew in time to look upon him as a friend, and to a certain extent a protector; for hanging just between her seat and the door, he would have served to screen her for a moment from the gaze of any sudden intruder, and give her time to conceal anything not intended for the public view. The seat was neither stool nor chair, but a stout old brown-leather-bound edition of Sir Walter Raleigh's "History of the World," which she had dragged from under the pile of doctors' books,—it would have been esteemed a treasure in many families, but the Hastings, had cast it aside as lumber,—and which was quite large enough to accommodate her little person, for Agatha was very small for her age. Seated on this, and resting her back against the packing-case, she could use her knees as a desk and read or write as she felt inclined (only now and then varying her employment by lying on her face on the floor and plodding through a page or two of Sir Walter, whom, it must be confessed, she found rather a tough morsel), wrapping all her properties together in a newspaper before leaving, and depositing them in the friendly shelter of the great box, whence, happily for her, no one ever unearthed them.

Again and again was Miss Clarice North's visit to

Swanborough postponed ; but at last the death of her brother set her free to go whither she would, and one September evening she arrived at Mrs. Goodman's, having given only a day's notice of her coming.

"Who has been at my books, Goody?" she asked the next morning, after that important process which ladies call "giving orders" had been gone through. "I have just found some original poetry, written on the back of one of your local draper's circulars, between the leaves of Kingsley's 'St. Elizabeth.'"

Whereupon Mrs. Goodman confessed the liberty she had taken with Miss North's library, which was, as she had expected, freely condoned.

"No harm done, Goody; the child was welcome to have them, and, as you say, you couldn't ask my leave, for you didn't know where to write to. Dr. Hastings' little girl, you said? The very family I was intending to look up; their mother was my favourite schoolfellow. I'll call there to-day," she went on, more to herself than to her hostess, "and make acquaintance with this small poetess who has been poaching in my preserves. I only hope that none of her takings have proved too strong meat for her young digestion."

Accordingly that afternoon Miss North lifted the old-fashioned brass knocker that hung above Dr. Hastings' door-plate, and inquired if the Doctor or any of his family were at home.

"No, ma'am," was the disappointing answer she received from the round-eyed, crop-headed little maid-

servant who answered her summons, the last of a succession of workhouse girls who had made their *début* in domestic service under the auspices of Sarah Hastings—"they're all gone out."

"You are quite sure they are *all* out?" persisted the lady, unwilling to relinquish her quest.

"Yes, ma'am, the Doctor's just been fetched to old Mrs. Gain, as have got the airy-slipus very bad, and Miss Hastings and all the young ladies and young gentlemen have gone a-blackberrying. Wait a bit, though! I don't believe Miss Agatha's gone. I heard Miss Hastings say she should stop at home because she came in late to dinner. Worn't it a shame! I'll go and look for her, ma'am, if you'll step into the drawing-room." And Mercy, who was a conscientious though untrained little handmaid, proceeded to search the house from top to bottom, even peeping into the cupboards, in case Miss Agatha should have taken it into her head to hide in one of them, but returning at last unsuccessful.

"Well, well, if you have looked everywhere and can't find her, I may as well be going," concluded Miss North.

"Please, m'm," replied truthful Mercy, "I haven't a-looked in the surgery attic—belike she's there; but cook's gone out of a arrant, and I dursn't go up by meself, in case Miss Agatha medn't be in there after all. I see somethink orful there one evening that I just peeped in; it made my blood run cold!"

"Haunted, is it?" asked Miss North, a little con-

temptuously. "Nonsense, child! Run away and look, and I promise you you'll see nothing worse than yourself."

Mercy's knees smote together at the thought of going alone up that dark crooked staircase with the door at the top, behind which hung that gruesome shape; but she never dreamed of disobeying an order given by one of "her betters," so she went bravely out of the room, ejaculating on her way a little prayer of her own compiling—"From all dangers *ghostly* and *bodily*, good Lord deliver us." And no sooner had the petition gone up than she heard Miss North's voice calling behind her, "Stop, girl! I'll go and face the bogie myself. I never saw a spectre yet, and am curious to know what they are like."

"Indeed, ma'am!" rejoined Mercy with perfect simplicity, as she led the way to the mysterious chamber.

"You needn't wait," said the lady, as she began to mount the winding stair—not without some difficulty, for she was rather lame—"unless you like to come and reassure the ghost, who I expect will be more frightened at me than I at him." But Mercy was only too glad to take herself off and leave the bogie and his visitor to fight their own battles.

Miss North knocked gently on the attic door once or twice, but eliciting no response, for Agatha was just then riding off with a mediæval knight-errant on some heroic enterprise, and of course deaf to all present-day sounds, she lifted the latch softly, and

saw, first the skeleton and next the little pale-faced, dark-eyed girl sitting on one book and reading another that lay on her lap.

"Here she is!" cried the new comer, as Agatha started to her feet in astonishment. "I thought we should find her in some bower of her own!

" 'Is the bower lost? Who sayeth
That the bower indeed is lost?'"

To which Agatha antiphonally responded,—

" 'For my spirit in it prayeth
Through the solstice and the frost,
And the prayer preserves it greenly
To the last and uttermost.'"

"Well done, little one! You and I are sure to get on together, with such a mutual friend as Mrs. Browning. Now you wonder who I am, don't you? Did you ever hear of Miss North?"

"Miss Clarice North?" repeated Agatha, gazing in utter bewilderment at the personage before her, for instead of the Clarice North whom she had pictured to herself, she beheld a little shrivelled-up, crooked, elderly lady, with grotesquely plain features, who rejoined laughing,—

"What! you didn't expect to see such a Mother Hubbard, eh? You seem to know something of me, and I have heard a little about you, my dear, and have come on purpose to have a chat with you. I don't think we'll remain here though," she continued, rather to the relief of Agatha, who was feeling that she ought

to offer her visitor a seat, but could see nothing available except the limited accommodation afforded by Sir Walter ; " we'll go downstairs together, and you shall tell your mother's old friend all about yourself."

So Agatha, not quite sure that it was not all a dream, conducted Miss North down to the stiff little drawing-room that Sarah always kept in such trim and tasteless order, and soon found herself unfolding her hopes and aspirations to her new friend as she had never done to any human being before. They saw a good deal of each other after that, and when Miss North's stay at Swanborough was drawing to a close, she sent for Dr. Hastings and told him that she had a project to submit to him.

" I am a solitary and sickly old woman, the last of my race," she said, " and I feel it would do me good to have a fresh young life springing up beside my own. Dr. Hastings, do you think you could spare me your Agatha ? She shall have a good education, and I will see that she is provided for after I am gone. Not that that is a near contingency, humanly speaking ; I called myself an old woman, and I look like one, but I am not fifty-four yet. Now will you think this over and let me know ?"

It did not appear to Dr. Hastings that such an advantageous proposal required any thinking over at all. He knew that Miss North had the reputation of possessing a liberal income, and of being a generous and kind-hearted woman ; and he was only too glad to

grasp at such an excellent provision for one, and that one in his opinion the most helpless, of his five portionless girls. She was a religious woman too, and though the Doctor made no profession of piety himself, yet with an inconsistency often met with he felt satisfaction in the thought that his daughter would be under the care of one who did. He assured Miss North with many expressions of gratitude that he was too much alive to his child's interests to hesitate in the matter for a moment; and so it came to pass that when she left the town, Agatha, well pleased with the arrangement, accompanied her, and the old surgery attic knew her no more.

CHAPTER III.

FROM CHILDHOOD TO WOMANHOOD.

DR. HASTINGS had done well in entrusting Agatha to the care of such a friend as Clarice North. Her unbeautiful exterior and somewhat *bizarre* style of speech concealed a refined and cultivated mind and a warm heart; she knew how to train and guide the imaginative tendencies that Sarah Hastings would have remorselessly crushed, and she was rewarded for her pains by seeing the visionary, fanciful little girl develop into a grave, earnest Christian woman, and later on take her place among those who both by written word and personal effort seek to raise and teach their fellow-men. And Agatha clung to her friend and repaid her kindness with almost a daughter's affection as the two lives went on together side by side, sometimes in England and sometimes on the Continent, for Miss North, like many people who are out of health, was restless, and liked frequent changes of residence.

Only once had the shadow of separation come between them. During a summer visit to a village among the Welsh mountains they had made the

acquaintance of a fellow-lodger, a young artist, who as he happened to know some old friends of Miss North's was admitted to a greater degree of intimacy than would otherwise have been the case, and Agatha, now a sedate young woman of two-and-twenty, with a good deal of the artist in her own composition, believed that she had found her *beau-ideal* in Clement Lascelles, with his deep melancholy eyes, his flowing dark hair, and his boundless aspirations after the beautiful. He on his part did not fail to be impressed by the humility with which she accepted his criticism on her water-colour sketches, and the rapt attention with which she would hang upon his lips when he bewailed the Art-blindness of a utilitarian age, or dwelt upon the exquisite happiness of a life devoted to the pursuit of Beauty and lived out amid surroundings all of which should form tones in one great Art-harmony; and he began to think that it would be rather nice to have a clever and not unattractive woman like this, and with a comfortable little fortune to boot,—for he took it for granted that she was to be Miss North's heiress,—to adore him for the term of his mortal life. She was a year older than himself, to be sure, but that was a disadvantage he was generously willing to overlook; and joining her one evening as she lingered on the hillside to watch the pink flush fade from the peaks of Snowdon, he spoke words to her that sent her home with a light step and bounding heart. Not that he had actually asked her to marry him, but he had given her to

understand that as soon as he returned from London, whither he had been unexpectedly summoned for a short time, he would formally request Miss North's consent to their engagement.

For the next few days Agatha went about in a roseate dream. Outwardly she was the same as usual, but inwardly she was luxuriating in her new-born happiness, which seemed in its first dewy freshness something too intimately sweet and sacred to confide even to "Aunt Clarice," as she had learnt to call Miss North. And Miss North herself, who had looked on Lascelles as an ordinary enough youth, with a fair amount of artistic talent and a quite undue amount of conceit, did not dream that her *protégée* could have thrown away her heart in such a quarter. Nor was she ever enlightened as to the true state of the case. While Clement Lascelles was in London he happened to meet a young lawyer of his acquaintance, a member of the family whose name had proved his passport with Miss North, and from him he learnt in the course of a confidential chat that the old lady intended to leave only a small portion of her money to Agatha. "The bulk of it," he jocularly informed his friend, "goes to Homes for Lost Cats and Refuges for Unemployed Burglars, or some such useful objects. The old dame never made any secret of that, and my uncle, with whom I am now in partnership, drew up her will."

This was quite enough for Lascelles. Agatha Hastings with Miss North's money was one thing;

Agatha Hastings without it was quite another ; clearly she was not for him. He at once decided that it was impossible to return to North Wales ; he sent for the pictures and other things he had left there, and then he wrote to Agatha, ostensibly on the subject of some manual of sketching she had been inquiring about, but really to convey to her as delicately as possible the fact that his views with regard to her had been altered since they parted. Circumstances, he said, had changed, "and he felt that he must abandon for ever those hopes that, in a moment of folly for which he now bitterly reproached himself, he had allowed to slip from him. He could never ask her to share the struggles of a poor artist's life ; he hoped that she would soon forget what he had said that evening," and a good deal more not worth setting down here ; but there was a ring of falseness about it all that effectually cured her *tendresse* for the writer, and when not very long afterwards she heard of his marriage to a plain and characterless but well-dowered young lady, her first impulse was to thank God for having preserved her from the fate of being such a man's wife. She was convinced by this time that what she had taken for love on her part was only love's simulacrum after all, and she felt that she could meet Clement Lascelles anywhere with perfect indifference. But in this matter she was not soon destined to be put to the proof, for he and his wife took up their abode at Florence, and she was thenceforth only reminded of his existence by seeing his pictures from time to time

in the Royal Academy, and once or twice hearing him spoken of as a rising artist.

So ended the only episode of a sentimental nature that had ever broken the smooth current of Agatha Hastings' life—a fact which caused her no regret, for marriage, the *summum bonum* of most women, possessed, in itself, no attractions for her. It was an axiom with her that the loneliest and most unloved old maid is a more enviable being than an unloved or unloving wife, and she had never, with that one exception, met any man whom she could even have fancied capable of arousing in her those feelings lacking which, as she herself had said in one of her books, married life is only the outward and visible sign without the inward and spiritual grace.

After all, Miss North did not keep to her original intention with regard to the disposal of her worldly goods. "Agatha, child," she said to her adopted niece a few days before her death, which took place, at the close of a lingering illness, when Agatha was two- or three-and-thirty, "it is time I told you what you will have when I am gone. I always said, you know, and I meant it, that I would only leave you just enough to keep you above want, but within the last six months I have changed my mind, and the other day I had a fresh will made. I had left the residue to charities, but I have been thinking that gifts come warmer from a living hand than from a dead one, so I leave it in trust to you, child, to use for God and for your neighbours. I can rest assured that you will do that, can I not,

Agatha?" And Agatha, holding the withered hand in hers, and resolutely choking back the tears that would come with the thought of the separation with which the promise was linked, answered solemnly, "So help me God, I will."

The world seemed a terribly desolate place to her after her best friend had left it, and when the first sharpness of her grief had subsided her heart began to go out to her kindred, and she longed to bridge over the gulf which had lain between her and them for so many years. There had been changes in the Hastings family since the old Swanborough days. Death had swept away the Doctor and his eldest and youngest daughters; two of the boys were in Australia and the third in China, and Jane, as we have seen, was with her husband in India. Only Mrs. Langhorne (besides herself) was left in England, and to her Agatha wrote proposing a visit, or rather accepting a standing invitation which Fanny had sent her some time before. She received a cordial and affectionate reply, and it was during this visit that the suggestion was made that she should take up her abode permanently at Maple Bank, which was rather too large for the family requirements, a proposal to which Agatha was "more than willing," as Mrs. Goodman would have said, to agree. Stockhampton, with its many factories and its large working-class population, seemed an excellent field for the fulfilment of the charge Miss North had laid upon her; and then it was so nice, she said to herself, that Fanny should feel so warmly towards her

as to desire her perpetual presence among them, and it would be so pleasant to take her place in the family as the loved and trusted maiden aunt, the support of her sister in domestic emergencies, and her helper in training the young minds of the children towards all that was lovely and of good report. They seemed to have taken to her already, and she felt confident that they would soon give her their full affection, and learn to come to her with all their little troubles and difficulties. And though she was not much attracted towards her brother-in-law, she thought he might improve upon further acquaintance, or that even—alas for poor Agatha's conceit of herself!—*she* might be the means of improving *him*, and of bringing some ennobling influences into the muddy current of his world-encumbered life.

But life at Maple Bank did not turn out at all what Agatha's fancy had painted it. Fanny had been less actuated by sisterly affection in inviting her to share their home than by the advantage of securing a permanent boarder who was willing to pay handsomely for her accommodation,—for Agatha was exceedingly generous,—and whose modest literary fame would confer a certain amount of distinction on the Langhorne's themselves; and Miss Hastings soon discovered that the less she interfered in household matters the better. Once she reported to her sister some gross acts of wastefulness which she had found out on the part of the cook, the effect of which was to raise a storm in the kitchen, and to cause Fanny to keep up

a permanent grudge against her as the cause of her losing "the best servant she had ever had." As for Mr. Langhorne, she soon settled it that he and she lived in such totally different worlds that there could be no possible fusion between them, and with the children it was nearly as bad. As soon as the novelty of her presence in the house had worn off the boys grew indifferent and even disrespectful, and did not attempt to disguise their aversion to "Aunt Agatha's improving lectures," as they called all her attempts to bring before them even in the most simple and interesting way any of the wonders of Science or Natural History, or the heroic deeds of bygone days. Miss Hastings had long been fired with the ambition to share in the training of boys, the hope of their country, the citizens of the next generation; but now that the opportunity was granted it only brought her the chagrin of seeing her eldest nephew develop under her eyes into an indolent young dandy who thought it a great act of condescension to go down every day to his father's counting-house, as Mr. Langhorne insisted on his doing; while Foxley, the second boy, who at the time my story begins was keeping his last term at Woodbury College, made himself a nuisance to her with his ceaseless chaffing. The wit of the family, and a clever fellow in his way, Fox, as he was commonly called, considered Aunt Agatha, her tastes, and pursuits fair game for his satire on all occasions, and often gave her reason to be thankful that she had been broken in to "taking jokes" when she was a little

girl. She generally received his with what she considered great equanimity, though we have seen that his mother held another opinion. So different is the measure by which others judge us from that which we mete to ourselves, and so often it happens that at the very moment you are congratulating yourself on having borne an annoyance with dignified composure, some kind friend is saying that you looked as black as thunder and as red as a turkey-cock. It is probable that the truth generally lies half-way between the two statements.

With all his faults, however, Fox was not a bad fellow at heart, and his aunt liked him a great deal better than she did his brother Hasie, otherwise Richard Hastings, and often said within herself regretfully, "Oh! Fox, if I could only get hold of you by the right handle!"

But Agatha's worst disappointment was Blanche. When she first came to live at Woodbury Blanche was a sunny, good-tempered little maiden, always ready to listen with pleasure if not with enthusiasm to the tales of which Aunt Agatha seemed to have such a boundless store, or to accompany her on botanizing expeditions into such country as could be reached in a short drive or railway journey, and quite willing to spend part of her play-time in dressing dolls for the children in Aunt Agatha's district, or illuminating text-cards for the patients in the hospital ward where she went to read every week, all of which Aunt Agatha looked upon as signs of good promise for the future.

But at sixteen Blanche was sent to a London boarding-school, from which she was turned out in two years' time a mere fashionable young lady; too much occupied with "Society" engagements of all kinds to afford her aunt even the small assistance in her labours of love which she had given as a child. Mrs. Langhorne's heart overflowed with motherly pride whenever her eyes rested on her fair young rosebud of a daughter, with her golden hair and blue eyes, and pretty trick of blushing whenever she spoke (it was only a trick, and by no means implied that Miss Blanche was more modest than most other young ladies—"Miss Langhorne's blushes are only skin-deep," a sharp-tongued old lady had once said); but to Agatha her niece's butterfly life, and the smiling *insouciance* with which she received any attempts to stir her up to a worthier one, were a sore vexation, and caused her more heartaches than either Hasie's foppishness or Fox's impudence.

So the story of Agatha's childhood was repeated. Dwelling under the same roof with her relatives she lived a separate existence, often never seeing them except at meals for days together; an unfortunate state of things, and one for which she herself was more responsible than she had any idea of. A little effort on her part to interest herself in the matters, trifling and paltry as they appeared from her higher level, which made up the sum of their daily life, would have served to keep up a friendly understanding between her and her sister's family, by means of which she

might in time have obtained some measure of that influence over them which she so much desired, but which she would never win while she only looked down on them from a pedestal—for in strife of this sort it is by stooping that we conquer. But Agatha, like many other good people, had enough Christian light to show her the meanness and shallowness of the rules by which the family at Maple Bank were guided, and on which she was tempted at times to animadvert with a sharpness that only increased their prejudice against her, but not enough Christian love to lead her to that daily and hourly self-effacement which such a course as I have suggested would have involved, and as years went on she grew more and more hopeless of getting any pleasure from her intercourse with them.

She found a good deal, however, in her little octagon sitting-room, with its quaint picturesque furnishing and its store of well-chosen books and periodicals, in her work for and among the poor of the city, and in her literary ventures, which sometimes brought her rich rewards in the shape of acknowledgments from strangers they had helped and cheered—lonely old maids, and weary workers among the sick and sinful, and eager young aspirants for the battle of life. Of all her outdoor labours the one nearest her heart was a little effort she had lately made for the benefit of the boys and girls in her district, which was a long narrow court, situated in the oldest (and now the most disreputable) part of the town, and entitled, no one knew exactly why, *Crook's Peak*. Among the denizens

of "the Peak," as it was familiarly called, were a large number of lads and lasses in their teens, who went out to work during the day in factories or elsewhere, spending their evenings in the streets or at the low theatres, and coming home at night to sleep—the "home" often consisting of a single room, in which a couple of drunken parents and a tribe of squalid children herded together. They were not an engaging set of juveniles, being for the most part rude and noisy in their manners, far from choice in their language, and not at all particular about speaking the truth unless it would serve their turn better than a lie; but Agatha's heart yearned over them, and she set about cultivating their acquaintance. She hired a room in the house of a decent and pious old woman, almost the only one of that type in the court, which, by means of some second-hand furniture, a piano, and a few cheap prints and oleographs, she soon converted into a cheerful little parlour, as far as possible from suggesting a school or mission-room, and threw it open on certain evenings in the week—one being appointed for the boys and the other for the girls—to her young friends, as she liked to call them, and really felt them to be.

The idea "took" with them, and "Miss Hastings' Room" soon became an institution in Crook's Peak; the youths and maidens liked to drop in after work on their respective evenings, and Miss Hastings herself was always there to give them a welcome and to teach them games, read to them, or play the accompaniments to the bright hymns and simple songs that they were

never tired of singing, or if they liked, to assist them in keeping up the little scholarship they had once acquired; and many a lesson of temperance, soberness, and chastity was written down from her dictation in grimy exercise-books, and carried away in triumph for home inspection.

Agatha could not have filled a report with her "results," but she believed that she had not laboured quite in vain; the rough, untaught children—childish enough, many of them, in everything but the knowledge of evil—learnt to love her and to think of her as a friend, and she loved them with a strong, patient love that never failed even when they went astray (and many and bitter were the tears their wanderings had cost her), but still spent itself in ceaseless efforts for their reclamation; bore with their seeming ingratitude; rejoiced over every little sign of improvement they manifested; and read with as keen delight as a mother feels at hearing from an absent child the queer, misspelt, blotted scrawls of letters they would send her when she was away from home, interspersed with texts and scraps of hymns, and ornamented with rows of "kisses."

She was eight-and-thirty now, though she did not look more than eight-and-twenty, and in many respects she was but little changed from the little Agatha over whom the skeleton had kept watch and ward in the old surgery attic at Swanborough. Her thirst for knowledge was as strong, her imaginative instinct as keen as ever; she could enjoy a fairy-tale with any six-year-old of her acquaintance and though the

sprites and cobolds that had peopled the happy hunting-grounds of her childhood had vanished from her horizon, she could still see around her hosts of spirits potent for good or evil; if there were no more monsters to be slain or captive princesses to be rescued, she knew that there was no lack of foul shapes of vice and ignorance to be vanquished, nor of children of the Great King lying bound in chains and darkness, in whose deliverance it behoved all good and true souls to lend a hand.

With such beliefs, and such work to occupy her, Agatha Hastings' life could never be devoid of interest or otherwise than well "worth living," in spite of the feeling of solitariness that sometimes crept over her; for she had not yet succeeded in making any familiar friends among her co-workers,—if the condition of having to go up and down other people's stairs is not always such a bitter one as Dante seems to have found it, it certainly has the disadvantage of being unfavourable to the cultivation of fresh intimacies,—and with the Langhorne's circle of acquaintances she had little to do. But those who have heard and taken to themselves that "*My sister*" spoken so long ago in Galilee can never know utter loneliness, and it was only now and then that Agatha allowed herself to cast a longing look back to the days when she had been blest with Clarice North's love and sympathy, or to that other time, still farther away in the mists of the past, when she used to sit on her mother's knee and be called "little Aggie."

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING OF BRICKS AND MORTAR.

THE great contractor arrived at Stockhampton in the 5.30 train on the following Tuesday, according to his appointment, and by half-past six he was installed in the largest and softest *fauteuil* in the drawing-room at Maple Bank, while the Langhorne family encircled him as devotees might their patron saint. His host and hostess seemed trying to outvie each other in attention to their anxiously awaited and much prepared-for guest; Hastings, in accordance with instructions received from his father, had endeavoured to assume an air of unaccustomed alertness—"Such awfully bad form, to behave like a smart shop-boy!" he grumbled to his own reflection as he was getting himself up for dinner; pretty Blanche was in the pinkest of blushes and the daintiest of sky-blue cashmere frocks; and Fox, who had seated himself by her side on the sofa, for the express purpose of imparting to her any particularly rich joke that might occur to him, appeared the most demure and decorous of youths.

As for the millionaire himself, the royal title which Foxley had jestingly bestowed upon him was by no

means inappropriate; there was something about his whole bearing that, with all its cheery good humour, bespoke dauntless energy and determination, capacity to rule and organize—to command and be obeyed. A noticeable man in every way was Nigel Lennox, with his large, strongly-built frame, his fine rugged face, half hidden by a mass of beard,—iron-grey like his bushy hair, with just a streak or two of silver upon it here and there,—and his bright expressive blue-grey eyes, at once keen and kind. There was just a suspicion of satire in them as he listened to Mr. Langhorne's half-apology for the rain that had come on while they were driving up from the station—"As though," Fox said to Blanche afterwards, "the governor had forgotten to tell the clerk of the weather what day His Majesty was coming."

"I am sure you must be very tired and hungry, Mr. Lennox," observed Mrs. Langhorne in her blandest tones. "Dinner will be ready almost immediately."

"Don't fash yourself about me!" was the cheery reply, "I can feast or fast, and do equally well either way."

"You shall not fast here, sir!" Mr. Langhorne hospitably assured him. "You don't mean to wait for Agatha, of course, Fanny?" He knew quite well that by Agatha's own wish they never did wait for her, but he was willing for his guest to infer that it was on his account they were not doing so this evening; and his wife taking up the cue answered, "Certainly not," adding in a half aside, "She has no

excuse for being late, for I told her before she started for the Hospital that we should dine earlier this evening. It's just like her!"

"Who's Agatha? Another daughter?" inquired Mr. Lennox.

"No, she is my sister," replied his hostess. "Agatha Hastings—she lives with us. She is an authoress, and rather erratic in her habits, as literary people often are. Don't you think so, Mr. Lennox?"

Whatever the millionaire thought about literary people, he held a very strong opinion against censuring the absent, and he answered rather drily, "Weel, I suppose we all have oor own peculiarities."

"That's *quite* true," she rejoined in a complimentary tone, "only some people have rather more than their share. But Agatha is a useful woman in her way; she is one of those energetic beings who are never happy unless they are trying to improve the world. She has made herself rather famous here lately by inventing a new scheme for relieving the poor without pauperizing them; it has got called by her name, 'Miss Agatha Hastings' System,' and has found great favour with several of the town clergy. I don't quite understand it myself; I cannot take up these matters as ladies can who have no household cares."

"That's one use I see in district-visiting and all that sort of thing," laughed Mr. Langhorne by way of being facetious; "it makes work for the single women, and keeps 'em out of mischief. Ha! there's the dinner bell at last."

While they had been speaking of her Miss Hastings had been approaching the house with rapid steps, and it happened, awkwardly enough for her, that the little procession was emerging from the drawing-room just as she entered the hall, a Quakerish little figure in her long grey waterproof and simple close-fitting hat of some soft grey material. She made a dash for the staircase in the hope of getting up unseen, but only succeeded in meeting her sister and Mr. Lennox half-way, while she heard Fox's loud whisper in the rear, "By Jove! there's Aunt Agatha." Fanny would have swept past her with a frown, but her companion insisted on stopping to shake hands, saying in his deep, rich Scotch tones, "Better late than never, Miss Hastings! Wasn't it too bad of us not to wait for ye?"

"Pray dress as quickly as you can!" was Mrs. Langhorne's half-whispered injunction, but Nigel Lennox called after her, "Eh! I wouldn't stop to dress if I were you. Come as you are, only change your wet shoes," and Agatha thought it would be as well to obey him literally. She slipped into a little room where garden hats, etc., were kept, threw off her bonnet and cloak, changed her boots for a pair of Blanche's slippers that were lying conveniently in a corner, smoothed her hair at the glass in the hall, and went straight into the dining-room, in what she called her "working-day dress"—a plain grey gown of the same stuff as her hat, innocent of flounces, tunic, or adornments of any sort, and only relieved by a piece

of black lace twisted round the neck, and fastened by a small cameo brooch.

Her sister flung a side-glance of annoyance towards her as she took her seat; in her opinion Agatha had better have stayed away altogether than appeared on such an occasion that dowdy figure; and certainly the severity of her attire was more noticeable than usual by its contrast with the glittering appointments of the table and the dressy toilettes of the other two ladies. The lack of harmony between Miss Hastings and her surroundings did not however trouble Mr. Lennox in the least; he turned upon her a face glowing with approbation, exclaiming, "Now I like that! I never saw the leddy before that wouldna have taken at least a quarter of an hour to titivate, and here ye come in all ticht and snod, before a body can say Jack Robinson. That's what I like. Never be ashamed of your workin' claes! I don't doubt ye've done a good day's darg in them, as we say in the North."

Agatha smiled, and Mrs. Langhorne's disquietude increased. "She is laughing at him," she thought, "and perhaps making a note of his oddities for reproduction in one of her tales. I shall tell her she must on no account do anything of the kind!"

But the good lady's fears were quite groundless; her sister was not laughing *at* but *with* Mr. Lennox, whose fearlessness in dashing through the conventionalities extorted her admiration, while she found his friendly if unceremonious style of address a pleasant change both from the more or less distant politeness she

was accustomed to receive outside the home circle, and the frank incivility she was frequently treated to within it.

"What made you so late, Agatha?" asked Fanny a few minutes later, choosing a moment when her guest was absorbed in conversation with her husband.

"Something I was obliged to attend to. I am very sorry about it," Agatha answered gently. "I tried in vain to get a cab when I saw what the time was."

"I don't see what compulsion there could have been about it," said Mrs. Langhorne sourly.

"Only the compulsion that lies on us all to help the friendless. I heard at the Hospital that one of the patients in my ward, an orphan girl, had gone out this morning, and taken a lodging with some people whom I knew to be of thoroughly bad character; I could not come home till I had got her away and into a respectable house."

"Of course ye couldna!" exclaimed Mr. Lennox, who had a wonderful capacity for seeing and hearing in several directions at once. "Not for any sake! It would have been leaving the doo' in the hawk's nest, as our Scotch proverb says. I said ye had done a good day's wark, didn't I now?"

The Great Contractor proved a most entertaining addition to the family circle. He had an insatiable thirst for practical information of all kinds; so that every new place he visited had a fresh charm for him, and in the drawing-room after dinner he had a hundred and one questions to ask about Stockhampton,

its trades, its institutions, and, above all, its charities. He was a warm advocate of the spread of education, and expressed his earnest desire to see free evening lectures and night-schools established everywhere, whereupon Fox remarked in an audible aside to Blanche, "Stockhampton can boast at least one effort in the right direction. There's a very comprehensive curriculum at Professor Hastings' establishment in Crook's Peak ; it includes history, geography, orthography, theology, physiology, and a number of other subjects, and the fee per term is *nil*, with nothing a week extra for manners, because there are none."

"Are ye describing it from your own experience?" asked Nigel Lennox drily ; and Fox for once looked slightly abashed. "Education's a gran' thing," he continued, "a vera gran' thing, though many young folks misprize it. When I was a laddie I often angered my gude mother by playin' truant fra my schuil, idle callant that I was. It was more to my taste to be playin' about the braes wi my wee sister Jessie, or buildin' bits of brigs across the burnies, and hoosies o' sticks and stones."

"You were always in the building line, Mr. Lennox!" said his host jocosely ; and Fox, who had soon recovered his assurance, observed *sotto voce* to his sister,—"'He were the *architect* of his own fortunes!'" He thought he had spoken in too low a tone for Mr. Lennox to hear him, and was considerably astonished when the great man turned towards him and said pleasantly, "Ye're fond o' a jock, my lad!"

"If a Jock's the same as a Jack, I'm fonder of a Jill," quoth Fox audaciously.

"Now, Foxie! how can you say so?" exclaimed his mother. "You know you can't bear young ladies!"

"That is not what Mr. Lennox means by a *jock*," said Blanche, who had been getting up Dean Ramsay; "he means something we had for dinner."

Mr. Lennox looked mystified. "Something we had for dinner, Miss Blanche! How do ye make that out, my dear?"

"We had a turkey for dinner," answered Miss Langhorne, blushing redder than usual as she found her recollections from the "Reminiscences" growing rather confused, "and—and—didn't some Scotch lady ask some one to take a *spaul of a bubbly-jock*?"

"A *bubbly-jock*, ou ay!" said Mr. Lennox. "Yes, I know that story—the Duchess of Gordon it was that said, 'Rax me a spaul of that bubbly-jock.' I see what ye're thinking of, but it wasn't that I meant either. I must really apologize," he went on with a comical look, "for leading ye all sic a wild-goose chase" ("or turkey-chase," put in Fox softly), and he proceeded to explain amidst a great deal of laughter that the whole *imbroglio* had been caused by his broad pronunciation of the word *joke*. When the general mirth had subsided, Mr. Langhorne, who knew what was one at any rate of his visitor's hobbies, politely entreated him to favour them with some more of his early recollections.

"I wad like to tell ye about my mother," said the

millionaire ; "nae lad ever had a better one, and she was not my ain mother either. I can't remember *her*, nor my father's second marriage ; I can only just mind his dying of an accident when I was about five years old, and leaving her, little more than a lassie herself, with us two bairns to fend for. Eh ! hoo she wrought and toiled and pinched herself for us both, but more especially for me, to get me a good education, for she'd set her heart on making a scholar of me—she was a wonderful intelligent woman herself, and wad be taking up a book in every spare minute. One spring morning I remember—I was just turned eight then—I thought I had a fine excuse for bidin' at home. 'I canna gang to schuil the day, mither,' quoth I ;" and the speaker gave a lively reproduction of his childish pleadings ; "'the sauls are just fa'in' aff my beets.'

"'Then ye maun gang barfit, like mony anither laddie,' says she.

"'Eh ! mither,' I whined oot, 'I canna gang barfit a' that way this cauld weather!'

"'Ye'll no stap at hame, ony gate,' said mother, and what did she do but set me up on her back and carry me every stitch of the way to schuil,—a full mile,—and fetched me home again in the afternoon, and that she did day after day for a while ; for she was that short of money at the time she couldna even afford to send our shoes to be mended, and she wad rather do and bear anything than run in debt. 'Them that canna pay maunna hae,' she used to tell Jessie and me when we teased her to buy us things."

"An excellent and devoted mother, truly!" said Mrs. Langhorne. "I don't wonder that you revere her memory, Mr. Lennox."

"I hope I won't be in a position to do that for many a long day to come!" he replied. "She's alive and well now, thank God, except that she's lost the use of her lower limbs through a stroke of paralysis she got a while back, and when ye come and pay me a visit at Glen Irvine I'll have the pleasure of introducing her to you. There's not a finer auld ledgy in all Scotland than my mother; she's no that auld either—she is but eighteen years my senior—that wad mak her seventy-five now, and she's always bright and cheerful, more so than half the young people I meet nowadays. She has her own apartments in the south-west tower, which she never leaves, and her own auld servant, Christian, that she's had for years to wait upon her, and her buiks, and her knitting for the poor, and there she sits as happy as a queen."

"It is easy to see what a dutiful son she has in you, Mr. Lennox," remarked Mr. Langhorne.

"Hoots! I often think all I can do is little enough to mak amends for the trouble I gave her lang syne. When I reached fourteen she was for sending me to Edinburgh to college; she'd been laying by towards that for years, and I just tauld her plain oot, 'Mither, I'm no gaun to be bathered wi buiks ony mair, and if I gang awa at all it'll be to Glasgie, to my Uncle Andrew, the mason'—that was my own mother's brother. 'Gang then!' says she, never meaning a word o't, 'for ye're



"AND THERE SHE SITS AS HAPPY AS A QUEEN.

[Page 47]

naething but a fash to me,' and I just took her at her word and was off the next morning before she was up. Weel I mind climbing the brae above Loch Voir and turning round for a last look of the auld place where I was born—the wee hoose and the bits of farm-steading and the loch lyin' grey and cauld in the misty light of the dawn. Prood enough I was—ill-contriven young sinner!—to be going out into the world to make my own way. There's a verse of Tennyson's that always brings that day before me. Hoots! now, how does it begin? Surely some of you young folks can tell me."

He looked inquiringly round the circle, but no one volunteered to supply the required quotation till at last Agatha Hastings began,—

" ' Make me feel the wild pulsation that
I felt before the strife.' "

"That's it!" cried Nigel Lennox, rubbing his hands gleefully, a way he had of showing his satisfaction.

" ' When I had my days before me and the tumult of my life ;

Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years
would yield,

*Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's
field,*

And at night along the dusky highway near and nearer
drawn

Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary
dawn.'

Put Glasgie for *London*, and you have just what I felt as I went on my way."

"Really now!" observed Richard Langhorne, "that must be very interesting for you to look back upon when you reflect that it was in Glasgow you laid the foundation of your fortunes."

"Ay," replied his guest thoughtfully, "but I was like enough to have gone clean to ruin there—for my uncle was a poor ne'er-do-well sort of fellow—if a kind Providence had not watched over me for good."

"'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,'" quoted Mrs. Langhorne; not very appropriately, but she thought it would go down well with Nigel Lennox, who was understood to be a religious man.

"True; and goes out Himself into the wilderness to seek the lost sheep," he rejoined, with an earnestness that almost startled his hearers. "Aweel, He provided me with a guardian angel in the shape of a douce honest lad, who brought me just the vera influence I needed at the time, if it was not the highest of all. He was an orphan, a year older than myself, and he had worked on our placie nearly as long as I could remember, for bairns were put to work early in those days,—there were no School Boards as, thank God, there are now to drive them to their buiks,—and many a ploy* him and me had had together. We were sworn friends, we two loons, though the vera opposite of each other in character; Jock was a' for lear', and was aye at me to teach him what I'd learnt at schuil, and 'twas wonderful the progress he made considerin' what a dominie he had. Ha!

* Adventure.

ha! ha! I mind telling mother, when she gave me a lecture one Saturday for no being able to remember anything I'd learnt during the week, 'Like eneuch! for it's all gane oot o' my heid into Jock's.' Well, I hadna been more than a week in Glasgow when one day as I was going along the street I saw a barfit loon standing staring with all his might in at a book-seller's window, and he had sic a shock of red hair as I never saw yet on any head but our Jock's. I just went up behind him and clapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Why, Jockie!' and he turned round as natural as if we'd been in the byre at hame wi', 'Weel, Nigel, I was just gangin' to yer uncle's to speer after ye.' 'But fat's brocht ye here, Jock?' I cried; 'is there onything wrang wi mither?' 'Nae-thing but the fash you've given her, rinnin' awa as if ye were the proadigal son instead of the decent lad I ken ye for,' he answered. 'And as to what brocht me,' he went on, 'I cudna stand the auld place wi'oot ye, sae I juist cam awa after ye, and yer mither's given me God-speed and a letter for ye.' I read the letter then and there; it was worthy of mother. She said she wouldna ask me to come hame since I had chosen to bide abroad, but for his sake that was gone she begged me to be a gude lad, and she advised me aye to be guidit by Jock, and never to choose a worse companion. 'And whanever yer hert bids ye come back,' she ended, 'there'll be a welcome for ye under the auld roof.' I could have cried over that letter, but I choked doon the tears so that Jock shouldna

see them, and asked him what he was gane to dee in Glasgie. 'Oh! I'll dee fine,' he said; 'an honest chiel can aye get a day's darg—and aiblins I'll pick up a bittie o' schuilin'.' Sae Jockie and me shared a garret, and he kept me oot o' mischief, and made me gang to the kirk with him on Sundays, and I submitted to his dictation as I wouldna have done to my mother's—sic kittle cattle as lads are! Before long I got into regular work at a builder's, which was my first step up the ladder, while Jock got a place as errand-boy to the very bookseller outside whose shop we had met."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Mrs. Langhorne.

"There's mair interesting to come. The bookseller was baith a wealthy man and a shrewd one. He soon discovered what good stuff there was in that red pow of Jock's, and he got him educated; and oor herd-loon is a learned man noo. He wan himself a name lang syne by his writings and lectures on the Greek mythology and sic auld-world lore, and is now an acknowledged authority on these subjects. But ye'd never guess what he's doing at this day. Some years ago I found that I had so much business of my own and other folks' on my hands that I must e'en get a secretary, and among a crowd of smart young birkes that came after the post who should make his appearance to my astonishment but Jock Micklejohn, whom I hadna seen for a whilie, though we aye kept up our auld friendship. 'Why, Jockie man!' I said, as I'd said in Glasgow lang syne, 'what's brought

you here?' and he answered, 'Just the same thing that brought me to ye before, Nigel—my ain hert.' My gude, leal auld friend! And he pled so hard wi me to take him, and drew such a pitiful picture of the lanesome bachelor life he was leading,—for he was aye one of those wise bodies that with all their kennin' kenna how to take care o' themselves,—that I hadna the heart to say him nay, though I had my doots how he would answer my purpose, so I just sent the lads aboot their business and kept auld Jock."

"I am afraid there are very few men in your position who would have chosen a secretary on such benevolent grounds," remarked Mr. Langhorne.

"Weel, I have never seen reason to regret it. We jog on together very comfortably, Jock and me, and he does a bit of literary work on his own account now and then."

"I don't believe we ever have to regret a kind action," said Mrs. Langhorne, who classed the hospitality she was exercising towards her present visitor among the kind actions she would never have to regret. "I think we had not the pleasure of seeing Mr. Micklejohn the night we dined with you, Mr. Lennox?"

"No; he was out at some literary gathering, but if ye care to see him ye can do so to-morrow; he's coming down by the 2.15 train to arrange some matters of business with me. I'm to meet him at the Clarence Hotel."

"Clarence Hotel? Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Langhorne. "Bring him here—bring him here, to be sure! We can offer Mr. Micklejohn a bed, of course, my dear?" to his wife.

"Oh! certainly," was her ready response. "We shall be delighted to receive him, especially after the very interesting account we have just been hearing of him. The idea of your sending him to the Clarence, Mr. Lennox!"

"Weel, I never like to impose him on my friends, unless he's specially invited," was her guest's reply; "but since ye're so good as to wish for him, here he shall come. Would it be too late, I wonder, for me ——"

"To send him a line to-night? By no means!" interposed his host, anticipating the wish. "You will find writing materials and quiet in the library if you would like to adjourn there, and one of the servants shall run with the letter as soon as it is ready." And Mr. Langhorne himself rose to conduct his visitor to the adjoining room.

The millionaire's temporary absence gave the rest of the family the opportunity to sit in committee on him.

"I never saw such a comical old creature in my life!" cried Blanche, with a silvery laugh that somehow grated on her aunt's ears in spite of its silveriness. *She* saw nothing to laugh at in Nigel Lennox; indeed, she was beginning to suspect that he might be a good deal more worthy of the homage lavished upon him than she had at first imagined; but knowing very well

that it was paid to his wealth and not to his worth, she felt none the less disgusted with it, especially when she contrasted it with the cold welcome that had been accorded to a London curate for whom she had once ventured to claim a single night's hospitality. The poor young man—he was literally a very poor young man—had been invited to Scotland for a change after a serious illness,—so his mother, a widow and an old friend of Miss North's, wrote to Miss Hastings,—but dreaded the long journey, which he could not afford to break at an hotel, and Mrs. Langhorne had consented to allow him to use Maple Bank as a half-way house, but had made so many difficulties about it, and had shown him so little cordiality, that her sister determined it should be the last time she ever made such a request. Richard Langhorne, indeed, would have unflinchingly bargained that she should pay for the accommodation the young clergyman received. "She'd have to do so if she was in a boarding-house," he said to his wife, who rejoined that it would be much better policy to make a favour of it, since if that sort of thing were once begun Agatha would be repeating it *ad libitum*, and they would never be free from incursions of her friends.

The remembrance of this episode haunted her now, and lent a severe expression to her face, which Fanny read as betokening distaste for Nigel Lennox, and she framed her answer to Blanche accordingly.

"A very good, kind-hearted man, my dear," she said, with just a little reproof in her voice. "I should think

not even the most fastidious person could help liking him, though he may be a little lacking in refinement."

"He seems deliciously straightforward and ingenuous," was Fox's comment; "I should think he must have been the original 'curly-headed boy who never, never told a lie.'"

"How well that dress becomes you, Blanchie!" remarked Mrs. Langhorne, taking a satisfied survey of her daughter.

"I was just going to say, 'How well Blanche became the dress!'" put in Fox. "Did you put it on with a view to making a conquest, eh, Miss Langhorne? How would you like to be Queen of Bricks and Mortar?"

"I wish you would attend to your manners a little better, Fox," said Hastings in a tone of annoyance. "You addressed Blanche and looked straight at Aunt Agatha!"

"Did I?" returned his brother drily. "I think Mr. Lennox ——"

"What about Mr. Lennox?" irritably demanded the master of the house, entering the room as he spoke. "Remember that he's only in the next room, and may be back at any moment. I beg that no remarks be made about him while he's in the house; I don't invite my friends here to have them insulted. Do you hear, Foxley?"

And Fox answered demurely, "Yes, sir."

CHAPTER V.

MR. LENNOX AND HIS SECRETARY.

WEDNESDAY morning was occupied in showing Mr. Lennox the lions of Stockhampton, in which city his coming, as one of the foremost self-made men of the day, had created no small interest. The Mayor had already, through Mr. Langhorne, requested the honour of his company to a municipal banquet which was to be given at the Guildhall on the Thursday evening, and the governors of the various charitable institutions had taken care to have them in apple-pie order in view of a possible visit from the open-handed millionaire, who was scarcely less famous for his wealth than for his liberality. Clean quilts had been served out to beds and clean pinafores to children; sundry long-delayed but necessary repairs were got out of hand with wonderful expedition; and there had been a general effort to impart a spruce and cheerful appearance to both rooms and inmates—with such success that nine out of ten inspectors would have written a flourishing report without a moment's hesitation (always supposing them to be of that sex which Miss Carpenter has said a clever matron can

bamboozle on every point). Even that typical functionary, however, would have found it no easy matter to "bamboozle" Nigel Lennox; no merely superficial examination ever satisfied *him*. He inquired into all the details of management of every charity he visited; he tried the armchairs in the Incurables' Home and the swings in the Industrial School playground; he pinched the orphans' cheeks, and punched their mattresses, and turned down the quilts to see what the blankets were like; and, moreover, astonished one or two highly-salaried officials by asking questions which evidently meant, in plain English, "What do you do for your money?" He always gave royally as soon as he had assured himself that his gifts would be well applied, but it was noticed that one or two humble little "Homes," that had deemed themselves too insignificant for the great man's notice, and were just in their ordinary working order when he called, got larger proportionate donations than some of the more ostentatious charities.

"I aye like to fin' oot the ins and outs of thae sort of places," he remarked to Mr. Langhorne as they drove home to lunch. "I can often pick up a wrinkle for my own guidance in matters of the kind."

"One would think the man had nothing in the world to do but to manage the concerns of hospitals and asylums," thought Hasie, who had accompanied them. "You take a wonderful lot of trouble about it, I am sure, Mr. Lennox," he said aloud. "You have been working all the morning like a whole Royal

Commission rolled into one, only they would have taken a month to accomplish what you have done in three hours. You must be awfully tired."

"Tired, lad!" echoed the millionaire. "I'm never tired except when I have nothing to do, and that doesn't happen very often." At which sentiment Mr. Hastings Langhorne opened his eyes, with an inward thanksgiving that Nigel Lennox was not *his* "governor."

The secretary arrived at Maple Bank early in the afternoon. Fox set him down at once as "a cure," and certainly the utmost that could be said for poor Mr. Micklejohn's *personnel* was that it possessed a sort of harmonious ugliness. He had a lank, ungainly, stooping figure, long straggling arms that seemed always in the way, a remarkably prominent nose, and very high cheek-bones. What his eyes were like it was impossible to tell, for they were concealed by a pair of dark-green goggles, but his hair still stood out from his head in almost as bright and thick a shock—its orange hue being but slightly tempered with grey—as on the day when it attracted Nigel's attention outside the Glasgow bookseller's window. Mr. Langhorne welcomed him with great suavity, and placed the library at the disposal of the two gentlemen for the afternoon; they would be quite undisturbed there, he assured them, as he threw open the door, not having the least idea that some one had already taken possession of the apartment.

It was a long room with a large bow-window at

the end and a smaller one at the side, in which stood a writing-table with a library-chair before it. Into this Mr. Lennox immediately threw himself. "Noo then, Jockie!" he was beginning, as the door closed upon their host, but broke off abruptly as Miss Hastings' slight figure suddenly made its appearance from behind a screen which half concealed the other window. The bright sunshine of the morning had opened the buds on the old pink thorn, and Agatha, anxious to begin its picture, had betaken herself immediately after lunch to the place from which the best view of it was to be had. She came forward now with some little confusion of face, feeling annoyed with herself for not having foreseen this probable appropriation of the room, and only desirous of taking herself out of the way as quickly as possible, but Nigel would not hear of her going.

"Sit doon, sit doon again!" he cried with good-natured imperiousness, taking her by the shoulders and replacing her in her chair. "If ye don't we'll just be aff oorsels, for it's not my way to turn leddies oot o' their seats, though I am a bit rough and ready at times. Besides, it's we that are interlopers here and not you. Business? Buff and nonsense! If we dinna incommode you you'll no fash us. We've nae state secrets to discuss, and if we had I doot ye'd no fin' them oot from us, for Jock and me commonly speak the dialect of our boyhood atween oursels."

Miss Hastings conscientiously warned him that she had once spent three months in the Land of Cakes and

was quite familiar with its phraseology, but "What of that?" was all the answer she got. "I see, though, ye want to get rid of us, so we'll just be off. Come along, Jock!"

After which she had no choice but to settle down to her work.

She did not at first pay much heed to the conversation which passed on the other side of the screen; it chiefly concerned matters of business, and was alike uninteresting and unintelligible to her, but by-and-by it turned into a fresh channel.

"Noo for the letters ye brought!" she heard Mr. Lennox say. "Bide a wee. Whar's the cheque-book? That maun aye be to the fore. Ha! ha! ha! Noo then, open ye those, Jock—they're a' beggin' letters, I ken, by the cut of their jibs—while I luik ower these. H'm, h'm—this is frae the Bishop of Chadminster anent yon great Industrial Home he was plannin' when I saw him last. What did I promise him, Jock? Was it four or five thoosan'?"

"I'm sur I canna remember," was Mr. Micklejohn's response.

"Fat's the guid o' ye then?" rejoined his patron with mock displeasure. 'I'll e'en gie him sax, and syne there'll be nae mistak. He wants me to come to the Palace for a day or twa on my way north, but that I maun decline with thanks. I maun be in Glasgie on Saturday, and Monday, please God, I'll see Glen Irvine again," and he began to sing in a deep-pitched but not unmusical voice—

"Hame, hame, hame wad I be,
Hame, hame to my ain countrie."

His companion made a sign in the direction of the screen.

"Eh! I beg your pardon, Miss Hastings. I forgot I was no in my own house, where I often break out wi a stave wi'out thinking."

"Do forget it again, Mr. Lennox," answered Agatha. "It is pleasant to hear music while one is at work."

"*Music!* Do ye hear that, Jock? There's a compliment for me," laughed Nigel. "Fat's that ye're readin' noo, man?"

"It's a communication frae the Dean of Alderbury anent yon clergyman's widow wi ten bairns that ye were asked to assist. He says he can thoroughly recommend her to your kindness."

"Then wreet to the gentleman that applied to me on her behalf, and say that I'll see to getting her youngest lassie into that orphanage he mentioned, and I'll pay her eldest son's expenses at Cambridge for three years—provided, of course, that he conducts himself weel. But they're no to ken wha the help comes frae. Noo for the next. A crest; ay, this'll be frae my aristocratic neebor. H'm, h'm—I thocht sae; he wants the loan of anither thoosan, and he shall hae't. He's a weel-deservin' lad, and it's no his faut that he's been hampered wi' his feyther's debts. 'Isobel and Grizel send their love and a kiss to dear Nigel Lennox.' Fancy their thinkin' o' me, the bonnie wee thingies! Anent that, Jock, d'ye ken it's just come ower me that

it's a sair peety the auld chapel yonner suld lie waste as it does. I wad like to hae't redd up, his lordship consenting" ("He'll consent fine gin he's no got to pay for't," put in Jock); "it wad be a job to auld Francie Flockhart of Murkleton. He's an honest chiel as ony in the buildin' trade, and his has been vera bad of late. It wad help to mak the Earl popular forbye, the wark it would gie to sae mony; naebody there need ken but what he's deein' it himsel."

"And wha will ye get to offeeciate in the chapel when its deen?" inquired the secretary.

"I've thocht o' that. I've been plannin' wi' mysel' to have that gweed mon Forsyth wi' his wife and weans up among oor banks and braes for a month or six weeks this summer or autumn, and he could hauld service there for the English visitors."

"Wad ye hae them at the Castle a' that time?"

"Na, I wad tak loadgins for them at ane o' the farmhooses, say Mistress Nimmo's. She wants every help she can get, noo that she has that family of orphan grandchildren on her hands. Ane gweed turn begets anither, ye see!" And Mr. Lennox leant back in his chair and indulged in a hearty fit of laughter, as though the idea of setting in motion a chain of events which should benefit everybody all round at his expense was the richest joke in the world.

Mr. Micklejohn, though not so much given to laughing as his friend, could not resist a chuckle as he rejoined, "I never saw the like o' ye, Nigel! I wad hae thocht ye had deen eneuch for the Forsyths

already. It was a fine thing for him to get the leevin', not to speak of your kindness to him in other ways."

"The leevin'—ou ay, in that dismal corner o' the East End," returned Nigel. "They'd need to fill their lungs wi' pure air once in the twal' months. How much o' holidays do ye think they had last year? Juist a fortnicht at Ramsgate; I never kent o't till the other day, and it made me tak' shame to mysel' to think o' a mon like that, wha's shoestrings I am not worthy to untie, wearin' himsel oot frae year's en' to year's en' amang a lot of ill-faured folks, while I can gang about the kintra at my wull, sittin' at rich men's tables and dressed in fine linen, if no in purple."

"Hoot, Nigel!" remonstrated Jock. "Here's a hantle mair appeals to your benevolence. An organist whase hands are paralyzed; a deservin' auld Scotchman in great distress in Lambeth; a doctor's widow wi' nine orphans. Fech! there's nae en' to them."

"Put them by and investigate them, the Scotchman especially. By the way, did ye inquire into the case of that puir auld Scotchwoman that the leddy cam to me aboot the ither day?"

"Ou ay, I forgot to tell ye; she's just a worthless, deceivin' auld body, and the fine leddy that cam and tell't ye she had kent her for years was her ain dochter."

"I wad like to hae the folks whupt that tell sic lees!" growled Nigel. "It gives me a sickenin' at human nature."

"Ye were aye a by-ordinar hater of lees, Nigel.

Do ye mind hoo ye lickit Will Cheyne once for makin' up some tale to ye?"

"Ay," replied Mr. Lennox more quietly, as he opened another letter. "I was ower rampageous that time, I mind weel. It was vera ill-faured and un-Christian-like of me. Fat leddy's this wreetin' to me noo? Eh, it's the mither of that misguided young Newson, wuntin' me to ask Mortis to keep him on. Na, na, I canna dee that after what he's done, though I'm wae for her, puir body; but I'll try to get him a fresh start some gate or ither, as he seems willin' to lead an honest life for the future."

"Am I to wreet and tell her sae?" asked Mr. Micklejohn.

"Na, I'll dee't mysel; ye wunna pit it kind eneuch, Jock, and I can see the puir wumman's hert is just breakin'. Fat's that unner yer hand?"

"Just the report of some new lodging-home for young lasses at Glasgie," answered Jock, rather unwillingly. "I doot ye'll no gie to it, for wha receives the subscriptions but that nasty, ill-tongued tyke that gave ye sic a bad name anent that Blind Asylum business."

"Hoot awa! Why should I withhold my help frae a gude wark because those concerned in it dinna all think me perfect? I believe yon to be a gweed mon and an honest, though he may have an ill-scrapit tongue whiles. Ye must send him twenty pounds from me."

"Deed an I wunna!" Jock protested. "I cudna bring mysel to dee't efter the way he misca'd ye."

"Jock Micklejohn!" thundered Nigel, "do I keep ye to write my letters or yer ain? Answer me that, mon."

"Of coorse, if ye insist upon't, Nigel——"

"I do insist upon't, or else I'll luik oot for anither secretary."

"Hoots! Nigel, dinna speak o' that. Of coorse I'll dee whatever ye wish."

"Be quick aboot it then, or I'll gar* ye send him a hunner, ye camstairy† auld chiel!" After which ultimatum the autocrat burst into another of his ringing laughs—a laugh that did one good to hear. "Weel," after an interval of silence, during which Agatha could hear the scratching of pens, "I think we're finished noo. Na, bide a wee, though. Miss Hastings!" he called out.

"Yes," said Agatha, coming round the screen.

"While the cheque-book's at hand what can I do for you?" he asked, setting a chair for her. "I know you are interested in a number of deserving objects. Which of them is most in need of help just now?"

"Thank you," she answered. She was more struck by his generosity than was apparent from her quiet reply, but she had been so disgusted by the fulsome way in which Mr. and Mrs. Langhorne had extolled it at the luncheon-table that she felt impelled into the opposite extreme,—“but you have been assisting most of them this morning already.”

"What of that? I've not given *you* anything. Ask for something."

* Make.

† Obstinate.

"But I want nothing!" returned Agatha naively.

"Happy woman! She wants nothing," laughed the millionaire. "Eh, but you're not like the ladies that come besieging me in London, wanting me to subscribe to this, that, and the other."—"They ken fine what'll please ye!" interjected Mr. Micklejohn.—"Come now, consider again. Haven't you any pet scheme that's as dear to you as the apple of your eye? There, you're thinking of it now, I can tell by the look of you."

"I have a pet scheme, but such an inexpensive one that I never need to beg for it," she replied.

"Better and better! Let me hear about it," and he listened attentively while she told him in a few words of her room in Crook's Peak and its visitors. "I think it has been the means of some little good," she said in conclusion, "though not as much as I hoped for."

"Which of our plans ever does that?" rejoined Nigel Lennox feelingly. "Many's the time I've tried to influence our workmen. I've had a missionary to preach to them, and got up reading-rooms and the like where they could go if they would and enjoy themselves in a decent-like way, and when their wages were paid I've talked to them myself and begged them not to squander their money, but to take it straight home to their wives—but wae's me! 'twas oftener than not like water split upon the ground. I've felt ready to sit down and cry when I've seen them flocking to the dram-shop the vera meenit the words were out of my mouth. Puir misguidit bodies!"

He spoke with such tender pitifulness that Agatha

felt rebuked as she remembered how often she had returned from an unsuccessful attempt to "do good" in Crook's Peak embittered at the stiffness of the people's necks. How far beyond her he was in Christian love and charity, this brusque old peasant-bred Scotchman!

"But we mus'n't despair," he resumed, "or we'll never accomplish anything. Set a stoot heart to a stey brae that's the way to win in the end. Here, Miss Hastings," and taking out his purse he counted some gold into her hand, bidding her give her young folks a tea-party or any other treat she might think fit. "Ye can tell them if ye like," he added, "that it's from one who was a working lad himself once, and who loves all poor lads and lasses, and wants to see them good and happy."

"But, Mr. Lennox, this is too much!"

"Buff and nonsense! No, I'll take back none of it; if there's any left I'll trust you to put it to a good use."

Agatha returned to her seat with the reflection that the King of Bricks and Mortar was certainly a very different sort of individual from the one she had expected to see. She had not, indeed, troubled herself much about him beforehand, but so far as she had pictured him to herself it had been merely as an exaggerated copy of the Stockhampton *gentlemen* whom Mr. Langhorne was in the habit of inviting to dinner—bumptious, purse-proud individuals for the most part, of whose vulgarity their hostess used to complain bitterly after their departure, notwithstanding the

bland smiles with which she never failed to welcome them. But this transparent, large-hearted, sweet-natured man was of another type altogether. "And Fanny thought I should not like him," she said to herself, "and would have had me away during his visit. Why, I would not have missed it on any account!"

CHAPTER VI.

ANGELS AND ASSES.

A GOODLY assemblage of Stockhampton magnates gathered round Mr. Langhorne's dining-table that evening to do honour to his distinguished guest, and the drawing-room after dinner was crowded to overflowing, principally with the stronger sex, though there was a sufficient proportion of shimmering feminine jewellery and gay-hued feminine attire to relieve the monotonous black and white of the conventional Englishman's evening dress.

Agatha Hastings had for years past adopted a style of her own, which never having been in the fashion was never out of it. To-night she wore a black velvet gown,—Aunt Agatha's one dinner costume, the young Langhornes contemptuously called it,—made as plainly as her grey "work-day dress," except that it was cut square in the neck and trimmed with some rare old lace. Ornaments she had none except an antique gold chain, which, like the lace, had come to her from Miss North, and two dark crimson roses, one in her hair and the other on her breast. The Woodbury ladies, who were noted for

the magnificence of their toilettes, had criticized her a good deal when she first came to Maple Bank, but they had got used to "Miss Hastings' fashion" now, and looked upon it as part of herself—peculiar, but not on the whole unbecoming.

Agatha generally found the Langhornes' parties rather wearisome affairs, but this was an evening to be remembered. It was a treat she would not willingly have missed to watch the King of Bricks and Mortar as he sat surrounded by a crowd of courtiers, who hung upon his words with obsequious deference, and lavished on him an amount of adulation that would have carried a smaller-minded man off his feet. There was evidently some great peculiarity about Mr. Lennox's powers of hearing. Acute as they generally were, it was often remarked that when anything in the shape of a personal encomium was addressed to him he suddenly appeared to become stone-deaf; the broadest flattery and the most delicate compliments fell alike unheeded on his ears, while he went on laughing and talking, cracking jokes and telling anecdotes, and being generally hail-fellow-well-met with everybody.

Some of the younger men, not venturing on a direct approach to the millionaire, tried to ingratiate themselves with his secretary, but soon gave him up as an unprofitable speculation; for old Jock had no fund of small talk, and was always gruff and shy with strangers, especially when he suspected them of addressing him with an object. He retired to a corner slightly in the rear of his patron, where he sat peering out upon

the scene around him through his green goggles, till Miss Hastings, pitying his forlorn appearance, took a chair beside him, and after several unsuccessful efforts to find a topic of common interest, at last succeeded in drawing him out upon the double authorship of Homer. This was a subject on which Mr. Micklejohn had expended a good deal of research; he soon waxed eloquent, and his harsh features lost a little of their grimness, expanding still more when he suddenly perceived that Fox Langhorne was standing behind his aunt's chair and lending him apparently the most respectful attention. The secretary, taking him for a youth of receptive mind, paused after his next stop to ask condescendingly, "Well, my young friend, and what do you think about it?"

"As far as my opinion goes for anything," answered Fox with assumed modesty, "I don't see that it makes much difference whether there was one Homer, or two, or three, or none at all for that matter. We have the writings that go by his name—and don't you think, sir, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating?"

Mr. Micklejohn's interest in Fox suddenly collapsed. He did not vouchsafe him even a look in reply to this frivolous speech, and was about to resume the thread of his discourse for Miss Hastings' benefit when her attention was claimed by a gentleman who advanced towards her with a slow, gliding movement, his head thrown slightly back with an air of abstraction, and his eyes raised upwards with an expression

which was understood by those who knew him to indicate a perpetual yearning after the infinite. This was Mr. Algernon Maudsley, from London, a gentleman of some repute in æsthetic circles as an art-critic, who being on a short visit to his native town, where his father had been a highly-respectable hatter and deacon in a Baptist chapel, had done Mrs. Langhorne the favour of accepting her invitation for the evening.

A greater contrast to the angular old student before him could hardly have been imagined. His hair, indeed, resembled the secretary's in hue, but instead of sticking up abruptly from his head, as did Micklejohn's, it was beautifully crisped and silky, surrounding his delicate, oval face, almost womanly in its fairness, with what a poetical friend had once described (much to Maudsley's gratification) as an aureole of rippling gold.

"How d'ye do, Miss Hastings?" he said, his soft, rather drawling voice falling with curious effect across the deep full tones in which Nigel Lennox hard by was discussing the merits of various kinds of building stone with some gentleman in that line. "I have managed at last to steer my way to you through this well-dressed mob. I'm shockingly late; the fact is, I was reading 'Locksley' for the third time, and could not tear myself away from it. You have read it, of course, and will know how to make excuse for me."

"I have read it, but I am not at all enthusiastic about it," she answered.

"What! Could anything surpass those exquisite

pages of word-painting? Why, it is the best-praised book of the season—among people of taste."

"I daresay," said Agatha; "though that is rather ephemeral praise after all. Yes, I know that author's descriptive powers are marvellous, but I can't say that I really enjoy her books. They interest me for the time, but when I lay them down I never feel in the least degree helped or cheered or lifted above myself."

Maudsley raised his eyebrows with a mildly supercilious air. "You must not look for that sort of thing in a work of Art, Miss Hastings. The union between Art and didactic teaching, always an unnatural one, is fast being dissolved by the consent of the cultured world. We only degrade Art—whether the poet's, the painter's, or the story-teller's art—when we set her up in a pulpit to preach to us. It is not her mission to echo our shibboleths, or to teach us penny moralities, but to delight our eyes with harmonies of beautiful tints, our souls by mirroring the passions of the human breast."

"I do not think yours an ennobling conception of Art," was Agatha's rejoinder. "You must remember that her sphere is not in Utopia, but in a world full of bad and sad and weary people. You seem to set her up like a sculptured figure in the market-place, with a lamp in one hand and a pitcher in the other, solely for the sake of effect, but you forbid her to carry a drop of water for the refreshing of thirsty souls or a spark of light at which dark minds may be kindled."

Jock Micklejohn nodded his head with taciturn approval. He felt by no means amicably disposed towards Maudsley, who had interrupted at once his conversation and his view of Nigel; for Jock somehow always felt happier and less crusty when Nigel was in sight—his love for his life-long friend being the one soft spot in the rugged, cut-and-dried old bachelor's nature.

"You speak as if the mission of Art were a merely utilitarian one!" said Maudsley. "It is not her work to fill half-pint mugs for the million, or to light their farthing candles. Art has not to *do* but to *be*; she knows nothing of the distinction between Right and Wrong—only of that between the Ugly and the Beautiful, the Commonplace and the Sublime. Take our best modern poetry as an example."

Miss Hastings remarked that there was a good deal about Right and Wrong in the works of Tennyson and the Brownings, for instance.

"Ah!" replied Maudsley, with the air of a connoisseur correcting the mistakes of a tyro, "but we do not call those our most modern poetical writers. They are,—Tennyson and Mrs. Browning especially,—when read in the light of the advanced taste of the present day, just a little out of date, you know."

"Dear me!" enunciated Mr. Micklejohn's gruff Scotch tones. "How vera auld-fashioned Shakespeare and Milton must be!"

Maudsley favoured his new opponent with one of his mildly-supercilious glances, and went on, "We have

a new set of men coming up who are fast bringing our art-conceptions to——”

“A dead level of animalism,” suggested Agatha a little mischievously, as he paused for a simile.

“No, oh ! no ; we will have nothing dead, nothing lifeless—in fact, Art in the truest sense was never so living, so renascent as at the present day. What I was going to observe was that we are fast approximating to the conceptions of the ancient Greeks, with whom religion might be said to consist in the worship of natural beauty.”

Agatha was just going to ask him if that was such a foregone conclusion as he seemed to premise, when Mr. Micklejohn himself took up the cudgels on behalf of his friends the ancient Greeks. “That,” said he in his slow, deliberate manner, “I entirely deny. It is utterly false to describe the religion of the ancient Greeks as that and no more.”

“What !” exclaimed Maudsley. “Can you look at their statues, their friezes, their very myths, and deny that beauty was the Hellenic ideal ?”

“Their ideal, I grant ye, but not the object of their worship,” said Jock. “They were, as St. Paul afterwards told them, a very religious people, and under the form of natural beauty they ‘ignorantly worshipped’ God. If they idolized nature, they did so because it was to them, as Plato would have said, the *eidolon* enshrining the Divine *idea*.”

“Or as Goëthe would have said, the time-vesture they saw God by,” said Agatha.

"But as for you and your æsthetic friends, young man," proceeded the secretary, "ye needna think to claim spiritual kinship with them, though ye may whiles deceive the unwary as the Gibeonites deceived Joshua. These same auld Greeks that ye cry up at such a rate, would have made short work with the haill clan of ye."

"Don't you think," said Miss Hastings, "that Mrs. Browning gives us the key to the whole matter in those noble verses of hers, 'Pan is Dead'?—

" ' By your beauty which confesses
 Some chief beauty conquering you,
By our grand heroic guesses
 Through your falsehood at the true.' "

"Ay. There ye have it. Mrs. Browning had a vera high order of mind—for a woman."

Maudsley looked towards Agatha, hoping that this affront to her sex from her ally would send her over to the opposition, but she was already aware of Jock's misogynic propensities, and only smiled a little as she rejoined, "At any rate she was capable of perceiving under much that is false and foolish in Greek art and mythology a feeling after and leading up to that which all true Art to be worth anything should lead up to—that which those lines we are all so familiar with call 'the Eternal Fountain of the Heavenly Beauty.'"

"Vera gude, Miss Hastings." It was Nigel Lennox who spoke, suddenly wheeling round upon his chair, a common practice with him, as Agatha afterwards found out. "I'm particularly fond of those lines. It's

aye the first thing I do when I go to the Royal Academy to look up and read them. I call them the text and the pictures the sermon."

"And a very poor sermon, like many we get from the pulpit," laughed Maudsley to Agatha, as Mr. Lennox resumed his former position and topic of conversation. "In fact," he went on with a lackadaisical air, "I never go to the Royal Academy now. It is like searching for a needle in a haystack to hunt out the few really good pieces of work among the mass of glaring inartistic crudities that disfigure the walls. But in a little while, when some of the old fogies have dropped off, *nous aurons changé tout-cela*. By that time I hope no one will go there to be instructed in the history of England, or to admire studies of apple-cheeked young rustics at school and orthodox old rustics reading the Bible at their cottage-doors, with a fine foreground of cabbages and a pump in the middle distance. The pictures of the future will be of a totally different stamp. And so will it be in literature," he continued with prophetic force. "The time will come when no one will look at a book written with a moral purpose."

"Then will they all have to be written with an immoral purpose?" inquired Fox innocently.

"You write yourself, Miss Hastings," pursued the critic, without noticing the interruption or the quiet chuckle with which Mr. Micklejohn greeted it. "If I may say so you would do well to bring your work more into accordance with the spirit of the age, other-

wise you will certainly be crowded out in the struggle for the survival of the fittest. I assure you, you would even now (to put it on the lowest and coarsest ground) find your books *pay* better if you would put more of Art and less of dogma into them."

"Possibly," said Agatha coolly, "but I have no idea of prophesying on any mount for any Balak who comes with the rewards of divination in his hand, as one of my favourite writers puts it."

"Ha! there was something in the man that said that," ejaculated the secretary.

"It was a woman!" rejoined Agatha.

A hearty laugh burst from Nigel Lennox, and the debaters became aware that he had again turned towards them and was lending an attentive ear to their discussion. "There's for ye, Jock Micklejohn. Don't ye crawl sae croose about the inferiority of weemen's intellect again!"

"Talking of Balak," said a brisk little town councillor who formed one of the group round the great contractor, "that reminds me of a good thing a friend of mine told me the other day. He was visiting one of these new-fangled parsons that are explaining away all that we used to believe, the Reverend Darton of Stockham Bridge, and in the course of a sermon on the afore-mentioned subject he tried to make out that Balaam's ass never really spoke at all—that, in fact, it was only a bad dream the prophet had. So my friend, who's a droll fellow, says to him coming out of church, 'Well, Darton,' says he—'Well, Darton,

I never understood before that Balaam's ass was nothing but a *night-mare*!"

"Does any one still believe in the speech of Balaam's ass?" inquired Maudsley of Miss Hastings, under cover as he thought of the laughter excited by this racy anecdote.

"I do!" asserted Nigel Lennox stoutly.

("So do I," remarked Fox in his aunt's ear, "for I've often heard asses talk.")

"Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Lennox!" exclaimed a mild-looking clergyman on the outskirts of the court circle.

The millionaire faced round upon him with a look that made him shrink back abashed into obscurity.

"What do ye mean by thanking *me*, man?" he thundered. "A fine pass we've come to if we're to be thanked for believing the Bible! *I'm* thankful I've got a Bible to believe in."

Several gentlemen hastened to express their own orthodoxy, while Maudsley calmly resumed, "I suppose these old beliefs will always linger in out-of-the-way circles long after they have been given up by thinking men."

"And I hope they will," said Agatha with some warmth, "as long as your 'thinking men' have nothing better to offer us than in this world ignorance of all Truth (except of a purely material kind) in general and God's in particular, and in the world to come death everlasting."

"And with many of them," said Micklejohn, "the

story of Balaam is repeated over again, and those who refuse to see angels are reduced in the end to hear asses !”

“There, my lad, ye have your answer !” laughed Mr. Lennox, turning round and flashing a comical glance of congratulation to his secretary and Miss Hastings at once. Maudsley reddened to the roots of his aureole. It was bad enough to be snubbed by old Micklejohn, who if a bear was at least a bear of culture, but to be disposed of thus coolly by an ignorant upstart, as he considered Nigel Lennox, was more than æsthetic flesh and blood could stand ; he moved away to the other side of the room with a look of ill-concealed annoyance, and soon afterwards took his departure, with a sigh of pity for the unappreciative swine upon whom the pearls of his eloquence had been so cruelly wasted.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEN BY OTHER LIGHTS.

ALGERNON MAUDSLEY had come down from London, not so much to revisit the scenes of his childhood as to consult on some æsthetically important question with a friend of his, an artist of his favourite school, who, having been commissioned by a neighbouring nobleman to copy a valuable old painting, had condescended to sojourn for a time in the uncongenial atmosphere of Stockhampton. His name was Turnbull, and its homeliness was a sore vexation to him; indeed, he had often contemplated going for a time to Italy and returning metamorphosed into Tornabuoni, but stern necessity had made this impracticable hitherto. He was lying back comfortably in a reclining chair, dressed in a loose brown velvet jacket, and smoking a pipe as he turned over the leaves of some Art journal, when Maudsley, who was sharing his lodgings for a few days, entered the room. His ruffled plumes had been in some degree smoothed during his walk from Maple Bank by the reflection that perhaps the contumelious treatment he had received might be accounted for by the youthful appearance he so sedulously strove to

cultivate, and which had often caused him to be supposed several years short of the one or two and thirty that he counted, but he looked bored and *ennuyé*, and flung himself on the sofa with a sigh of relief.

"How did you fare among the Philistines?" asked Turnbull.

"Made sport for them," was the short reply.

"I'm glad I'm going away to-morrow," he said presently. "I really could not stand any more Woodbury entertainments. These great gaudy suites of rooms, with their garish upholstery, their huge mirrors, their gilding and stucco and flaring gas-light, and their cram of ill-dressed, brainless people, are too unendurable to a person with any sense of beauty. To-night's affair reminded me of Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace, only the victims were not the recalcitrants but the devotees of the golden calf themselves." (Mr. Maudsley was not quite so well up in the Scripture history as he was in the Greek Anthology.)

"Commend me to the Woodbury ladies for execrable dressing!" laughed Turnbull. "I think there is only one woman in the town who has any original ideas on the subject—a Miss Hastings; you would see her to-night, by-the-bye."

"Miss Hastings? I've just been holding a disputation with her, as I often did in old times when I lived here. She's a woman you can talk to with a hope of being understood at least, though there's a good deal of narrowness and conventionality hang-

ing about her still. As you say, she knows how to dress ; I felt quite grateful to her for the relief it afforded me to contemplate the rich heavy folds of her black velvet gown. But as for the other women, I think they outdid themselves. I wonder they can have the conscience to abuse noble materials as they do. Mrs. Langhorne, now, was in a dress made of two different pieces of stuff, which arranged in large masses would have formed a delightful harmony, but she had utterly spoiled them by having them minced and clipped into such endless alternations of puffings and pleatings and frillings, as only the misdirected ingenuity of a fashionable dressmaker could achieve."

"How was her daughter dressed?" asked Turnbull.
"Nothing could spoil *her*."

"Ah! I ought to have excepted Miss Langhorne from my sweeping condemnation. She really looked very charming. Her frock—some sort of Indian muslin, I think—was covered with a mass of creamy lace, from which her fair head and shoulders emerged like Venus rising from the sea and veiled in its foam; the tight-fitting dress rather enhancing the effect by revealing the exquisite outlines of her figure."

"And so they were all worshipping the golden calf?" remarked Turnbull, after a pause.

"Yes; and a regular calf he is. He seemed deeply impressed with Miss Hastings' powers of argument, though I don't believe he understood half of what she said. I was trying (though unsuccessfully) to help her
{ out of the slough of Philistinism, and a queer old

fellow, not without mind, who was sitting by—Crœsus's secretary I believe, but he must have been a little *non-compose* before he brought himself down to fill such a post—chose to contradict me on every point, and that old clodpole of a builder kept cheering them both on as if he had been at a prize-fight or a north-country wrestling match. I accepted his scorn as a greater compliment than his approval, though it wasn't exactly pleasant to be set down in a mixed company by an ignorant upstart like that, as if one were a raw schoolboy."

"I have seen some of Miss Hastings' books," observed the artist. "They are considerably above the level of commonplace inanity, though of course the 'goody' element comes too much to the front. It is a pity she does not concentrate her energies upon the development of her mental faculties, instead of wasting them on a lot of pottering work that any pious old busy-body could do as well—carrying tracts and coal-tickets to the poor, and sitting on a score of committees of grand motherly societies for managing them and their affairs; thrift associations, ladies' temperance unions, and what not. How a person with any pretensions to culture can belong to a temperance society is a problem I never could solve."

"I should think such was very rarely the case, said Maudsley, whose list of "cultured" persons was extremely exclusive.

"Not that I should feel any compunction about 'depriving the poor man of his beer,' as the phrase

goes," proceeded Turnbull dogmatically, "for I am convinced that the inordinate quantity of malt liquor consumed by our working-classes stultifies all their higher aspirations, and keeps them in a state of base discontent with their squalid surroundings; and as for those hideous gin-palaces, with their meretricious decorations, that in a town like this offend one's eye at every turn, I would willingly vote for having them all improved off the face of the earth. But what I mean is that your thorough-paced temperance fanatic cuts himself off, root and branch, from a thousand charming and picturesque associations. Think how many noble efforts of genius have been inspired by what are called 'the drinking customs of society'; think of the village inn, ever a favourite theme with poets and painters, beneath whose swinging sign the rustics of Merrie England sat quaffing the nut-brown ale—of the mead and metheglin that cheered the souls of our Norse and Anglo-Saxon ancestors—of the circling wine-cup at the feasts of the Greeks and Romans—of the multitude of pleasant myths that are linked with the name of Bacchus; to a rigid abstainer all these are part and parcel of the accursed thing, hateful as swine's flesh to a Jew. To be consistent he cannot even enjoy the sight of the vineyards of the sunny South—the merry grape-gatherers and the foaming must."

"Or a picture like those divine girls in last year's Grosvenor," said Maudsley. "Don't you remember their rosy-white limbs, splashed with the blood of the grapes in which they stood ankle-deep?"

"Or a poem like Redi's 'Ode to Bacchus in Tuscany,'" Turnbull concluded. "What! you never read it? Then read it now—I have it here. It's a grand thing—comes down rolling and tumbling like the water at Lodore (or like Southey's description of it, for I've never seen it); but your teetotal zealots would sooner hear the creaking of a pump-handle."

"They're not worth talking about," said Maudsley.

"Speaking of your friend Miss Hastings though, I could a tale unfold," said the other rather mysteriously. "You know Fleming Crossley, don't you?"

"What, the author of 'The Houses of the Future,' and all those books on architecture? Yes, I have a slight acquaintance with him."

"I used to know him very well. He and I happened to be down here together a couple of years ago, and one day—I remember it so well—we went for a stroll down Town Lane, where there are some rather fine old houses, now inhabited by the dregs of the population, and going along he could talk of nothing but Miss Hastings, to whom he had lately been introduced. I could see she had made a deep impression on him, and I verily believe he would have made her an offer within a few days—he was always an impulsive fellow—but for a sight he beheld that very afternoon. I had just been saying to him that if his city of the future ever became *un fait accompli*, we must really try to effect a corresponding improvement in the manners and customs of our lower orders, or at least teach them to confine their indulgence in inebriety and

highly-flavoured language to the privacy of their own interiors, when we suddenly (unseen by her) perceived the lady of his fancy a few yards in front of us. She was piloting a drunken woman across the road—a loathsome object, with her tangled hair flying about her smeared, bloated face, and her torn frouzy garments scarcely able to hold together. She had cut her finger too, presumably with a broken gin-bottle, and the blood was dripping from it and leaving a red track behind her as she staggered along in the wake of Miss Hastings, swearing horribly all the way. Faugh! it makes me sick now to think of her. I know we both had to get some brandy going home. And Miss Hastings actually took the beastly sot's hand to drag her out of the way of some vehicle, that would have done the world a service by ridding it of such a degraded wretch. It was enough for Crossley. He said he should never see or think of her again without being reminded of that foul creature, and the association was too revolting!"

"So I should imagine," said Maudsley with a shudder. "Hasn't he since married Miss Duvernet, the actress?"

"Yes. Don't you remember how divinely she played Adrienne Lecouvreur?"

"Talking of that, have you seen *Adrienne; ou, Une Fille de Paris*? No? Then I must send you a copy. A new acquaintance of mine, one of your clan, showed it to me first. His name is Lascelles, and he has been living in Florence for several years, but thinks now

of settling in London. I hope he may, for he's an agreeable fellow ; a widower, but not a very desolate one, I fancy. He bought *Adrienne* as he came through Paris, where it has just come out. You'll revel in some of the descriptions—they're heavenly ! A good deal of it wouldn't bear translating into English, of course—as English ideas go now, that is."

"I see," laughed Turnbull. "A case of '*nascitur non fit* for publication.'"

"That's a fine lassie, Jock !" was Nigel's comment when alone with his henchman. He used the adjective in its Scotch sense, which refers to mental and moral rather than to physical qualities. "Eh ! didna she gi'e yon birkie his answer though ?"

"Ou ay, she's an intelligent wumman," Mr. Micklejohn responded rather coolly, for he thought Nigel had strangely overlooked his own share in the wordy victory, compared to which in his opinion Agatha's had been mere light skirmishing. "But wad ye ca' her a lassie exactly ? She's no that young."

"I wudna think her mair nor eight-and-twenty, and that's young to the like o' you and me, Jock Micklejohn, my jo. She's a fine wumman ony gate. There's something sae innocent about her."

"Hoots ! I wad rather have applied that term tae yon bonnie bit niece o' hers," said Jock.

"She's a nicelike bairn eneuch," rejoined Nigel, "but the monkey kens hoo to flirt, fine. I watched her mair than ance the nicht. I dinna believe her

Aunt Agatha cud flirt if she tried. Cud ye expleen tae me noo, Jock, fat was the differ atween her views upo' Art and yon fine-spoken callant's? I thought there was something haythenish aboot his logic, but I cudna hae tell't whar 'twas wrang."

"The differ atween *us* and him," said Jock, "was that we like Art to hae a saul as well as a body, while he's content to take the fleshly part o't and lea' the speeritual oot o' sight."

"I'm thinking I cam' doon ower sharp on that meenister-body," was the millionaire's next remark. "The puir mon meant weel. Fin' oot the morn, will ye, Jock, whether he has ony gweed warks gangin' forret in his parish, and sen' him a donation. Miss Hastings wad be able to tell ye. That's a beautiful name of hers—*Agatha*."

"Ye seem taken wi' her at a' points," laughed Mr. Micklejohn. "She's evidently superior to the rest of them here, and it strikes me they're not ower ceevil to her. I was standin' at the staircase window this afternoon lookin' oot into the garden, and I heard that gleg-tongued chiel Fox speakin' up to her as impident as ye please—they were in the dining-room wi' the door open. And she never answered him back, but spoke to him the next meenit as pleasant as possible."

"I wad like to have gien him a cloot on the lug!"* exclaimed his patron wrathfully.

"After that I heard him telling her she wasna half wide awake, that she ought to have got a good picking

* Box on the ear.

out of Cræsus for her different schemes; and her answer was to the effect that you had given her something of your own free will, but that as all your money seemed to go for good purposes it matter little whether it passed through her hands on the way or not."

On hearing which Mr. Lennox nodded his head approvingly, and ejaculated, "Vera gude!"

Late as it was when the last of their guests had departed, the Langhorne could not resist lingering in the drawing-room for five minutes to review the events of the evening.

"What an exciting triangular debate you and Algernon Maudsley and that odd old secretary seemed to be carrying on!" said Mrs. Langhorne to her sister. "Rather too much so, indeed. I don't think these discussions are in very good taste in a drawing-room full of people."

"They're great fun, though," said Fox. "There's nothing so flat and slow as a dialogue in which all the speakers agree with one another. And I'm sure that conceited humbug Maudsley wants a good setting-down now and then. Do you know that he has just had his windows at South Kensington fresh glazed with tiny square panes, all carefully knotted, and of a muddy, greenish tint, through which a dim irreligious light struggles into his *interior*, as he would call it?"

"I do not consider him a humbug though, Fox," said his aunt; "for he is perfectly sincere in his theory of art. I have no sympathy with it or him, but I

would rather live in a community of Algernon Maudsleys than in one of Peter Bells."

"Like us, for instance," sneered Mr. Langhorne.

"Why, Richard," exclaimed his wife, "what ideas you take up! Most likely Agatha was thinking of our guest."

Agatha coloured with annoyance at these two equally unjust misreadings of her speech. "I meant neither," she said, very quietly.

"I don't know who Peter Bell was, and I don't care," remarked Hastings, "but I should say *Ursa Major* was the best name for Mr. Lennox. Did you hear how he snubbed poor Mr. Minchin?"

"Why, I thought that rich!" cried his brother. "Minchin's such a poor miminy-piminy sort of fellow; he always seems as if he were apologizing for his own doctrines. I say, Aunt Agatha, I haven't once heard you express an opinion about our Scotch cousin. Do tell us what you think of him. Now, silence! every one—the oracle speaks."

Agatha paused on her way to the door.

"I think he is utterly different from any one I ever met with," she said with deliberation. "As much so, indeed, as one of the old crusaders in Welsham Church would seem if he were to rise from his tomb and appear in modern society."

Hastings gave a little mocking laugh. "Fancy comparing old Nigel to a crusader! I should have called him an average specimen of the regulation nineteenth century hero, who begins life with a penny in his

pocket, develops into a millionaire and philanthropist, and gets his memoir written by some parson after his death."

"Very neatly put, my young friend," said Fox, clapping his brother on the back, "but not convincing to Aunt Agatha, I fear, for she didn't stay to hear it."

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONG THE PICTURES.

THE secretary returned to London on the following day, which was spent by Mr. Lennox in an excursion with his hostess and her children to a famous old ruin some ten miles from Stockhampton. Somewhat to his disappointment Miss Hastings was not one of the party. She had another engagement; not such a pressing one, however, that she would not have set it aside had her sister expressed a wish for her company, but as this would have involved an uncomfortable crowding of the carriage,—for both Hastings and Fox wished to share the expedition, and had taken leave of absence from college and counting-house for the purpose,—Fanny quietly allowed matters to take their course. So it happened that Agatha saw very little of Nigel Lennox on this the last day of his visit; for in the evening he was absent at the Guildhall banquet, and did not return till long after she had retired to rest. She was rather surprised at receiving a visit from her sister the next morning before she had left her room.

“I have come to see if you will help me out of a

dilemma, Agatha," Fanny announced. "I am afraid you will find it rather a bore, but I really don't know who else to ask."

"You know I am always glad to be of use to you, Fanny," returned Agatha in a slightly hurt tone.

"You needn't fire up so, Agatha. With all your public engagements how is one to know when to find you at liberty? But if you will do what I am going to ask you now, I shall be really grateful. You know we quite thought our visitor would leave to-day by the ten o'clock train, but last night some one was telling him about Lord Froxfield's pictures, and Mr. Langhorne hearing him express a wish to see them, promised I should drive him there this morning, stupidly forgetting all about Daynscot,—he can't go himself because of that meeting of the Bank Directors; he was to follow us to Daynscot in the afternoon,—and he insists that I shall do so now. I don't see why we should throw over old friends like the Putticks even on His Majesty's account, as Fox would say; and dear Bertram has been so very attentive lately—besides, I am sure he would not mind going to Froxfield alone if it were explained to him about our engagement; but this is just one of the little things in which Richard can be so obstinate; he says he made a promise and it must be kept. But if *you* wouldn't mind taking him, Agatha, as you are not going to Daynscot at any rate, he would be quite satisfied. You can have the carriage, and drop him at the station on your

way back in time for the 1.15 train; Richard will be there to see him off if he can manage it."

"Then I can go quite well," answered Agatha cheerfully. "I have to be at Canon Walton's District Visitors' Meeting at half-past two; he wants me to explain the new relief system to them, and that I can easily manage by getting some lunch in town."

"Oh! thank you!" said Fanny gratefully. "That's settled then; I must go and tell Richard. I will order the carriage at ten; we must take the train to Daynscot. I'm *very* much obliged, Agatha." And Mrs. Langhorne hastened down to the dining-room, where she found her husband standing in one of the windows glancing over the *Times*.

"Hum! Glad she's willing to make herself useful for once," was his comment on the information she brought him.

"I was afraid she would think it a bother," said his wife.

"What if she did? I don't see what the better people are for being religious if it doesn't teach them to put themselves out of the way for their neighbours now and then. What do you mean by that, sir?" as a half-suppressed laugh issued from the other window, in which Fox was ensconced with *Punch*.

"There's a good joke here," replied the young gentleman evasively, as their guest's footstep was heard on the stairs.

Mr. Lennox was not at all ill-pleased at the prospect of having Miss Hastings' society bestowed upon him that

morning instead of her sister's, though the latter lady had no more idea of this than she had of the pleasure which Agatha felt in anticipation of the same event, a pleasure which was considerably subdued by a piece of impudence perpetrated by Fox just as they were starting. Glancing back to the house as they drove out at the gates, she caught sight of that irrepressible young gentleman standing at an upper window with a sly grin on his face and a slipper in his raised hand, as though in the act of hurling it after them, while Blanche stood just behind him with an expression of mingled amusement at the joke and dread lest the great man should turn round and perceive it. Happily no such mischance took place, and Agatha's wrath at her nephew's impertinence had time to cool down long before they reached the stiff old Georgian mansion known as Welsham Hall, the large collection of pictures in which was, by the kindness of its noble owner, thrown open to the public whenever he was absent from home. It was, as Miss Hastings remarked to her companion, an unique one in its way, and a pleasant change upon those in most country houses, "which," she added, "generally consist entirely of family portraits and old masters, more or less genuine—not that the latter are altogether absent here, but it is Lord Froxfield's hobby to encourage rising artists of all nationalities, so that one gets plenty of variety. Another advantage is that you may linger about and study them at your leisure, instead of being marched round in charge of a servant."

"That's what I like!" he rejoined cheerily. "And are there not some curious old pictures by an early Venetian artist?"

"Oh, yes," said Agatha. "One in particular, 'The Walk to Emmaus,' that is something more than curious. Lord Froxfield is having a copy of it made as a wedding-present for his daughter; he values it immensely, and I don't wonder at it, for it is very touching, in spite of its crudeness; it always reminds me of those words, 'the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

"Ah!" said Nigel, "the painter will have worked in the spirit of that man on the Albert Memorial—eh, what's his name now?"—"Fra Angelico," suggested Agatha.—"That's him! You aye seem to know what a body means—the one that painted on his knees. Aweel, if we did all our work in that speerit, it would be better done than much of it is. I suppose you come here pretty often, Miss Hastings?"

"Almost as often as I can manage the time," she answered; "there is always something new to look at. I brought some of my Crook's Peak girls here a few Saturdays ago as a little treat."

"A treat for you or for them?" asked her companion.

"For me undoubtedly, and I hope for them," was her reply.

"Weel, that's something new! I never met with the leddy yet, be she as kind as she would, that didna find it an awful fash to take out a party of young folks sight-seeing."

"I am afraid the secret of my enjoyment of it lies in a natural *penchant* I have for imparting information," Agatha confessed. "Fox says it is one of my little weaknesses."

"Eh! then I'm in luck to-day," exclaimed Nigel gaily. "I aye like to have some one wiser than myself with me in a place of this kind; I've often been tantalized by being shown some fine historical painting, for instance, that I'm not well-informed enough to understand. So you must just fancy I'm one of your bairns, and tell me all about everything." And having thus expressed his wishes, Mr. Lennox proved his sincerity by marching straight up to the first picture that caught his eye as he entered the gallery, and demanding, "Now, Miss Hastings! Who's that monk glowering at the sick man in his bed?"

"Ah! Savonarola refusing absolution to Lorenzo de Medici. That is one of the early works of a now famous Italian artist."

"I don't wonder he's famous. Look at the fire he has put into that man's ee!"

"The star-look, shooting from the cowl,' as Mrs. Browning called it," said Agatha.

"That was well said. But, d'ye know,—this 'll show you what an ignoramus ye have to deal with!—I've no vera clear idea of who Savonarola was. Some kind of a reformer before Luther, wasn't he?"

"Yes," said Agatha, drifting almost unconsciously into a quotation,—

“ ‘ This was he who having tried the tank
Of old Church waters used for baptistry
Ere Luther came to spill them, swore they stank,’ ”—

which Mr. Lennox so evidently appreciated, and looked so plainly anxious to hear more that she continued the lines from “ Casa Guidi Windows ” down to

“ So fell back the Magnificent and died,”

and also gave him a short clear sketch of the work and death of the martyr-monk ; a congenial task to her, for brave Fra Girolamo was one of her favourite heroes.

“ And sae that’s him denying absolution to the great man on his death-bed ? Weel, his pardon would have been little use to the poor sinner, but it was bravely done of him according to his lights.”

“ If the tale is true,” she answered. “ It has been doubted lately.”

“ It’s a gude story, whether or no,” was his rejoinder. “ As Jock Micklejohn often says—Hoots, I forget the Italian words, but he translates them, ‘ If it has no ground, it’s very well found.’ Thank you for telling me about him.”

Miss Hastings received a good many expressions of gratitude for favours of a similar kind that morning. Like Arthur Clennam in “ Little Dorrit,” though with a different intent, Nigel Lennox was continually “ wanting to know,” and certainly none of her Crook’s Peak *protégées* had ever listened with such eager attention to her prelections as did this simple-minded old millionaire.

Of all the pictures, the one which charmed him most was an unmistakably Scotch scene—a sturdy boy in blue *bonnet* and tartan kilt leading a toddling baby-girl across a shallow mountain stream flowing through moss and heather, the clear water just covering the shapely ankles of the children, while in the middle distance part of a dark loch was visible, with mist-capped mountains rising behind it. “If that isna me and Jessie to the very life!” he cried, “and yon might be the brae by Loch Voir side. Puir Jessie! It sems but yestreen she was just sic a toddlin’ bit demikie,*—

“ ‘ When we twa paidlet in the burn
In the days of auld lang syne,’—

and noo she’s a grey-haired woman wi a pack of grandchildren. Eh, but I’d like to have yon picture. It minds me of the auld happy days.”

“That you ran away from, Mr. Lennox,” rejoined his companion slyly.

Nigel Lennox laughed. “Ah! you have me there. You’re right—I didna value them till they were gone for ever, ‘the days of auld lang syne.’ But that’s a mistake we all fall into; don’t ye think so?”

Agatha felt almost sorry that she could not own to a fellow-feeling on this point; but it was her fashion—perhaps she carried it to a fault—always to speak her mind plainly, so she answered, “I can’t say I look back with much regret to my childhood.

* *Demikie*, little girl. Literally, little dame.

It was a good deal my own fault, though, that it was not a happier one."

"Were ye that naughty?" asked Nigel.

"Not so much naughty as *odd*, I think," she answered. "I was what you would call in Scotland an *unwaurly* little girl."

"Who'd have fancied that?" he rejoined. "I wonder if she's much happier now," he thought, looking at her kindly, and remembering what he had heard from Jock Micklejohn on the night of the dinner-party. Whatever she might have been as a child he considered her as a woman a very agreeable companion, and one much more to his taste than most of the people he was in the way of being introduced to, for they generally seemed to take it for granted that he could feel no interest in any but the most practical subjects. Agatha for her part thought she had never passed a morning so quickly and pleasantly, and she experienced quite a pang of regret when the striking of the turret-clock warned her that it was time to think of going.

As they went down the steps they met Mr. Turnbull, who bowed to Miss Hastings, having a slight acquaintance with her. "That must be Maudsley's Golden Calf!" he said to himself,—he had caught the name "Mr. Lennox" from Agatha in passing,—as he uncovered his easel and prepared to go on with the "Walk to Emmaus"; a work that he set about reverently, not because the mingled sweetness and majesty of the Central Figure in the original had any import

for him, but because it was from the brush of a noted pre-Raphaelite. "Not a stupid-looking old fellow at all, nor an ugly one; in fact, rather grand in his way. Would make a fine model for some ancient hero or demi-god, or even a saint or apostle of the type of

" 'That old weather-battered Peter,
Whose stout faith only stood completer,' etc.

I suppose it was the snubbing he gave Algernon that made him so superbly contemptuous of him; and then he's so thoroughly penetrated with his own peerless beauty that he can hardly even recognize any other type. That's the worst of Maudsley, he's so awfully vain!" And Mr. Turnbull, who was a remarkably plain young man, with round puffy cheeks and small pig-like eyes, congratulated himself that *he* had never been addicted to the weakness of personal vanity.

"Do ye know what's my favourite picture of all others?" Mr. Lennox asked his companion as they drove back to the town. "Bide a wee, though—tell me first what yours is."

"This!" she replied, taking a small Greek Testament from her pocket, and showing him a tiny photograph of *The Light of the World* pasted in opposite to the title-page.

"Just what I was going to say myself!" he exclaimed. "Ay, there's nothing like that—I'm never tired of it. I've a copy hanging up in each of my houses, and I bought two in London for presents only the other day." And taking the open book from her

hand, he pulled out his eyeglass for a nearer inspection of the frontispiece.

"Would ye not like," he burst out suddenly—turning to Agatha with an expression that made her think of Clovis's "Why was I not there with my Franks?"—"to break open yon door and let the light from yon blessed lantern in upon the poor dark folks inside?"

"*I* should, and so would you," she answered, "but *they* might not, if it showed them more than they cared to see. There are some doors that only open from within."

"True," said Nigel with a sigh. "It's a mystery to me why folks should be so keen on barrin' out their own happiness. *I* like to be as happy as ever I can—don't you?"

Agatha smiled a little sadly. "Did you ever read Ruskin's remarks on that picture?" she asked him presently.

Mr. Lennox had not, and was intensely delighted when Agatha, who knew the passage almost by heart, repeated it to him.

"Which of his works is that in?" he asked. "I'd like to have it by me."

"I don't think I can tell you," she said. "I have it in the handwriting of a dear friend, my adopted aunt, with whom I used to live, but I will copy it out and send it to you if you like."

"If ye will I'll be very grateful. Ye see I never refuse a good offer. I wonder now, Miss Hastings, what those auld heathen Greeks, that you and Jock

Micklejohn and that fine-spoken young fellow were having such a disputation about the other night, would have said to sic a picture as that ? ”

“ ‘ The Eternal Fountain of the Heavenly Beauty ! ’ ” said Agatha, thinking aloud.

“ Just what was in my own mind ! ” exclaimed Nigel.

“ We only know what their successors did when St. Paul brought them the truth that it embodies,” she went on, answering his question ; “ some mocked and some procrastinated, and some clave and believed.”

“ As we see in Raphael’s cartoon,” rejoined Mr. Lennox. “ I live close to the South Kensington Museum, you know, and when I’m feelin’ a bit fashed or worried I just drop in there for a whilie ; a dauner * among the pictures aye refreshes me. Some o’ them are just like auld friends to me ; there’s a man in the right corner of one that I can never pass by, there’s such a lot of meanin’ in his face. You know him ? Ay, I thought you would. Doesna he look just happy ! I’m thinkin’ auld Simeon must have worn such a smile when he held the Lord in his arms.”

“ He at any rate has opened the door,” said Agatha.

“ That’s just it ! Eh ! what, is this the station ? Why, how quickly we have come. Now I won’t keep you, or you’ll be late for your meeting, and that would never do—I’ll likely see your brother-in-law presently. Thank you for all your kindness, and mind you write to me if you want the needful for any good work. There, I won’t have ye bide another meenute,” he in-

* Saunter.

sisted, cutting short the thanks she was beginning, and wringing the small hand that seemed quite lost in his big one. "Good-bye, God bless you, my dear!"

"*'My dear!'*" thought Agatha, exceedingly amused, as she drove away. "I wonder how old he thinks I am, or how young rather! The idea!"

She was destined, however, to a still greater measure of astonishment. As she passed into the streets, thinking how nice it was to meet with some one to whom she could talk thus freely and unrestrainedly on the subjects she cared for most, and hoping that she had not wearied him with too many words, she suddenly remembered that she had neglected to bring with her a magazine containing some remarks on the subject to be dealt with at the meeting, and which she had specially wished to read to the district visitors. She doubted being able to get it at any shop in Stockhampton, but knowing that it was generally on hand at the station bookstall, she bade the coachman return thither, and soon succeeded in her quest. Mr. Lennox was nowhere visible on the platform, but as she passed out through the booking-office the sound of a voice that could belong to no one else caught her ear, and she perceived him standing within a yard of her, gazing up at a map of Scotland on the wall, and tracing a line upon it with his stick, while he ran over to himself, evidently under the impression that no one was near him, the names of the places he thus indicated. "Birkshaws—Glenmuir—Strathquidder," she heard him say, and then, "Eh, Aggie my woman, gin

I had ye up amang oor banks and braes, we wad pit some roses into thae pale cheeks!" And he began to hum the tune of a Scotch ballad she had once heard sung ; it begins,—

*" Will you go, lassie, go to the braes of Balquither,
Where the blaeberries grow 'mang the bonny hieland
heather ? "*

Miss Hastings could hardly help laughing to herself as she hastened on. It was too ridiculous that he should think of calling her " Aggie my woman " in that familiar way—she who had been even as a child so staid and old-womanish that people, who never scrupled to address her sisters by their Christian names, always honoured hers with the prefix *Miss*, while as for " Aggie," she had not heard it once since her mother's death. Not that she would have cared, as an every-day thing, to have her beautiful name thus abbreviated, for she was proud of it now, though in the old Swanborough days it had been made a reproach to her by Sarah, who was often heard to wonder what could have possessed her mamma to give the child such a sentimental name, sometimes adding, with a superstitiousness strangely inconsistent with her matter-of-fact character, that if she had only had a good, plain, sensible one like her sisters, she might not have turned out so peculiar ; but somehow the word sounded differently from Nigel's lips than it would have done from any others—perhaps because, as she said to herself for the hundredth time, he was so different himself from any one she had ever met before. All

the other people she knew or had known through life, even the very best and nicest of them, seemed starched and tame and commonplace by comparison with this old peasant-bred millionaire ; while as for herself, never had she appeared so distasteful in her own eyes, or so deserving of the character she had once overheard Fanny give her, that "Agatha was all very well as long as she could get up on a pedestal and teach and preach and lay down the law on some exalted subject, but she was as indifferent as a stone to all the things people care most about, and it would never be said of her, as of her favourite Mrs. Browning's heroine, that—

" ' Men at her side
Grew better, girls purer, till through the whole town
The children were gladder that pulled at her gown.' "

Beside Nigel Lennox with his big warm heart, and his utter freedom alike from conventionality and self-consciousness, Agatha Hastings felt a cold, dogmatic, conceited creature, hard in her judgments and narrow in her sympathies, and she only wondered that he had taken so much interest in her as to follow her with good wishes after they had parted, and to call her—how absurd it was, too!—"Aggie my woman." But deep down below the drollery of the episode lay a something that stirred in her heart a feeling more akin to tears than laughter, a strange yearning to be once more a child at her mother's knee, that refuge in trouble that had, alas ! failed her so early—to feel again kind protecting arms thrown around her, and to hear a loving voice say, "Mother's little Aggie."

CHAPTER IX.

AT GLEN IRVINE.

MR. LANGHORNE did not succeed in getting away from the meeting of the Bank Directors in time to bid a last farewell to his wealthy relative, although the train for the North was later that day than usual—a circumstance which disturbed him more than it did Nigel, who was too warm a lover of human nature ever to find waiting at a railway station irksome; and that portion of human nature that travels third-class, and lives hardly and toils for its daily bread, possessed a special charm for him. Had he not once belonged to it himself?

Sitting on the platform that day at Stockhampton, he began to interest himself in a stout middle-aged woman and a young girl, apparently mother and daughter, who were standing not far from him with a deal box between them, on which was pasted a label with the inscription in sprawling characters, "*Mis Emly Purkis, pasinger to Winchworth.*" A more critical and less kindly observer would have remarked that neither of them was a very favourable specimen of the British workwoman. The mother's face had

that coarsened, bloated look—the features seeming to have lost their definite outlines, and to be on the point of running into one another—which generally betokens hard drinking as well as hard working, and her manner was rough and jerky ; while the girl, who seemed about fourteen or fifteen, had a pert, self-sufficient air and bold black eyes that peered restlessly from under the fringe on her forehead.

“I wonder when this here blessed train of yours is a-coming !” remarked the woman in a voice none of the steadiest. “I told you we should be in time enough ; you needn’t have hurried me out of the ‘Nelson’ before I’d finished my half-quartern—so sinking as I felt. It’s made me all of a trimmle, tearing along so. I shall have to get a drop somewhere to keep me up as I go home.”

“I wouldn’t if I was you, mother !” said the girl, with a wistful look in her dark eyes that softened them for the moment.

“Don’t you preach to me, my lady ! I’m old enough to take care of myself. I’m not like your aunt Becka, that don’t know when she’s had enough.”

“I should hope not indeed, mother !”

“Well, I shan’t stop much longer for this old slow-coach of yours. You’ve got sense enough to put yourself in, I suppose. You know which of the Winchworth stations to get out at, don’t you ?”

“Yes, mother, the second one. That’s where the cook is to meet me.”

“Going to her first place, puir queanie,” thought

Nigel, who had a soft corner in his heart for every young lad or lass beginning life.

"Well, I hope you'll give satisfaction," said her mother. "I hear they're very strict people, so you'd better be careful what you say before the children. But don't let yourself be put upon; some ladies will behave very ungenteel to a poor girl if they get the chance. If they try that on with you, you can just make them understand you've a mother at home as will know the reason why. And mind you behave yourself, and don't be coming back to be a disgrace to your father and me as have brought you all up respectable and never showed you no bad example."

"All right, mother, I'll keep straight, no fear!" answered the girl, in an off-hand way that perhaps more in appearance than reality belied her expressed good intentions. "I promised Miss Hastings I'd be a good girl. She called in yesterday to bid me good-bye, and kissed me and talked to me a good bit."

"Was that when I was lying down upstairs?" asked the woman sharply.

"Yes, mother, and I told her you was gone to uncle's, as you said I was to if any one called; but I ain't a-going to tell no more lies, mother, not for you nor nobody."

The mother gave a disdainful snort. "So you say!" she rejoined. "Well, I ain't against your keeping in with Miss Hastings; it might be to your benefit some day; but I've turned her up myself ever since she come into my place and insulted me asking me to sign the

pledge—me a creditable woman that's brought up a family! I'm not going to put up with that; 'tain't likely, for all the good she is to us!"

"I'm sure Miss Hastings has been *very* good to us, mother! Look what a lot of nice things she brought our Alby when he was ill, and don't you remember how she took Aunt Becka home that day she was so tight? Aunt Beck was bound to have been run over if Miss Hastings hadn't seen her to the door."

"So yon's the sort of raw material my new friend works upon," thought Mr. Lennox, as the woman kissed her daughter, affectionately enough, and went away. Something like a blush rose to the cheek of the girl as standing alone by her box she caught the eye of the kind-looking, grey-bearded gentleman on the seat, and wondered how much of their conversation he had heard.

"Tired of waiting, eh?" he said to her. "The train will be in directly—it's just been signalled. Is this your first going to service, my lassie?"

"Yes, sir; never been out before," she answered briskly.

"Aweel, I wish ye may do well. "I'll gie ye a piece of advice. Never be afraid of hard work, and be very much afraid of sinning against God. Will ye remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

Nigel Lennox took out his purse, and produced from it half-a-crown.

"There's for ye, and may ye never come by one

less honestly. And don't forget the kind lady's advice."

"No, I won't, sir—thank you very much, sir," replied Miss Purkis, with a gleam of satisfaction in her sharp black eyes, and a great deal of inward wonderment at the interest taken in her by this strange gentleman, who further took the trouble to see her into a third-class carriage in which were some respectable-looking women of her own class, and shouted a friendly good-bye to her from the window of his own compartment when she left the train a few stations farther on. To Nigel it seemed quite natural and a thing of course, though he could not have told why,—not being given to analysing his thoughts and feelings,—that he should "fash himself," as he would have said, about any *protégée* of Agatha Hastings.

It was late on Monday afternoon when he alighted at the tiny station of Blackden, the last on the single line of rail which had been laid down a few years before for the convenience of the ever-increasing number of visitors to the picturesque mountain region in the midst of which Glen Irvine was situated. The Blackden folk came out to their doors as he drove through the cluster of grey stone houses called by courtesy a town, though it was smaller than many an English village, and remarked to one another that Nigel Lennox was home again. So the inhabitants of the district generally styled him, not meaning any disrespect, but rather an honourable distinction (which

he was the first to appreciate); for they were not a little proud to think that the millionaire who had purchased the finest estate in all the county, and rebuilt the old historic pile that had become almost a ruin under the rule of its former poor and pedigree'd owners, was the son of a small farmer upon their own country-side.

For the first half of his two miles' drive the road, which followed the course of a noisy brown trout-stream called the Irvine Burn, wound along at the bottom of a deep sinuous ravine among the mountains,—the granite rocks rising up almost perpendicularly on one hand for many hundreds of feet, while on the other the rich mossy braes, dotted with juniper and hawthorn bushes, sloped gently upward to greater though less perceptible heights,—then the narrow pass suddenly widened into a green and smiling valley, bathed in light from the setting sun, and encircled by an amphitheatre of hills, some bare and rocky, some grassy and undulating, their lower slopes enriched with masses of woodland, while beyond them you caught glimpses of more distant heights rising range behind range and peak behind peak, those in the middle distance transformed into roseate and amethyst transparencies, those farther back graduating as they receded into more and more delicate and indefinable shades, till they become mere outlines of pearly grey upon a still paler background.

This was the valley of Glen Irvine, and that stately line of building rising prominent on a spur of "The Ben," as the highest hill in the mountain ring was

called, and surrounded by its own beautiful grounds, half park and half woodland, was Glen Irvine Castle. Nigel Lennox never turned that sharp corner of rock at the entrance to the Glen without a thrill of pleasure in the thought that all this fair scene belonged to him. Yes, it was all his, and all dear to him—those sentinel mountains on whose tops the clouds lingered and in whose recesses dark, clear tarns and lochs lay hidden like jewels among the bosses of a shield; his those wild lonely glens radiating from the main one, with their foaming linns and deer-haunted forests; and his that proud old mansion whose battlements now stood out in strong relief of red-gold light and purple shadow, while its many oriel windows burned like rubies in the sunset glow. And dearest to him of all, he said to himself as he passed under the sculptured stone archway known as the Grand Entrance, that fair old dame who never failed to smile her welcome to his homecoming from her window in the south-west tower.

The next day was a busy one, though which of Nigel's days were not so? Long before breakfast he was up and striding about his demesne to see that all things were in order, for Mr. Lennox looked well to the ways of his household, and woe betide man or boy who should be found guilty of neglecting his duties; the forenoon was passed among his tenants in the grey cottages, sprinkled promiscuously about the valley, that formed the village of Glen Irvine. He knew them all intimately, and made their interests his own, and if they found his rule a little too paternal at

times, his unfailing generosity to them in every season of distress and difficulty,—indeed at all seasons,—kept them from doing more than indulge in a little mild grumbling among themselves at “Nigel Lennox’s ways.”

He called first at the manse with a new volume of lectures by a famous modern exeget for Dr. Garden the minister, with whom Nigel, though a member of the Church of England, was on very excellent terms. Then he went on to old Fergus McQueen’s with the intention of bestowing a gay London picture-book on Fergus’s little grandson Davie—a sickly, stunted child, such as the Scotch call a *sharger* (literally an ill-nourished calf, but commonly applied to any wan, delicate-looking individual), but the idol of his grandfather, whose only companion he was—and a sound rating on Fergus himself for his abuse (as reported to his landlord by the factor the night before) of certain useful appliances wherewith his cottage had been furnished; but he found the old man hanging with such pitiful anxiety over the “wee loonie,” who was worse than usual, that kind-hearted Nigel was fain to leave the book and defer the lecture to a more convenient time. “Bide a wee though, Fergus my man,” he muttered, as he climbed the steep brae to Luckie Craik’s lonely shieling, to tell her that “he had seen her son Andrew in the Glasgie hospital yestreen, and his broken leg was mendin’ fine;” and he tasted the thin *broo* that was simmering over her peat fire, and bade her come up to the Castle in the evening for some broken meat from his housekeeper.

Thus he spent the morning, giving a friendly nod or a kind word of greeting to every one he met if he did not, as was often the case, detain them for a *crack*; stepping in at one door and another and chatting with the cottagers in their native Doric, asking after their bairns, and distinguishing between all the Jockies and Tammies, Bells and Jeans, with an exactitude that was surprising in one who had such a host of other and weightier matters to occupy his mind. I cannot say that the Glen Irvine people were very deeply impressed by his condescension. They were rather a stolid race, endowed with many estimable qualities, but decidedly wanting in enthusiasm, and whatever their landlord did for them was merely characterized as "Nigel Lennox's wye"—sometimes with the added remark, "Fat ither cud ye expeck?"

He was turning his steps homeward, after delighting the youngsters at their mid-day play in the school-yard by scattering among them the contents of a large packet of sweeties,—a product which some of the tinies almost believed indigenous to the laird's pocket,—when he was accosted by a stalwart young fellow with long yellow hair straggling from under his blue *bonnet*, and features that would have been handsome but for their vacant expression. "Daft Donal," as he was usually called, Donal being the local rendering of of Donald, was a *halflin* or half-witted lad who had been brought up by the parish, and was now employed as a cowherd by one of Nigel's tenants, a small farmer, who in return clothed and boarded him and protected

him from the insults of the evil-disposed. How wise or how foolish Donal was no one exactly knew. He had been sent when a boy for a short time to the Parish School, but it had been found impossible to teach him to read or write, though he generally remembered anything that was told him in simple language, and could repeat a few short hymns and easy rhymes which he had picked up from his master's children. He was a regular frequenter of the kirk, where he always listened with profound attention to Dr. Garden's discourses, and had imbibed some fragmentary ideas of religious truth, from which he obtained a much larger amount of practical comfort than do many whose theological views are vastly more accurate and comprehensive. For the rest Donal was conscientious and efficient in the discharge of his duties,—those deficient in intellect are often found to have a special gift for the care of animals,—*douce* in his general conduct, grateful to his employer, and sociable with mankind at large as long as it treated him with civility; but his heart's chief love was given to Mr. Lennox, at the sight of whom he grinned from ear to ear and burst into a loud, discordant laugh.

"He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!" he cried, thrusting his hand into the millionaire's with frank confidence. 'Is't yersel, Nigel Lennox? I'm gey glad ye're hame again. *I* like ye, if naebody else does."

This last phrase was, with slight variations of form, Donal's favourite mode of expressing his goodwill. It had once been employed to himself by a kind-hearted

man by way of consolation for a rebuff he had just received from some rude urchins, and Donal had found it so grateful to his wounded feelings that he had ever since been in the habit of using it to his most particular friends, who always took it as it was meant.

"Thank ye kindly for your good word, lad," answered the gentleman addressed. "Here's some bawbees till ye."

Donal chuckled knowingly as he dropped them into his pocket. He had a mania for amassing coppers, which he never spent, but stowed away in some secret hiding-place of his own. It was said—indeed he allowed it himself—that he was laying by with a view to matrimony, but who was the lady of his choice he could never be induced to tell; it was believed, however, that he was wavering between Lord Kintail's old Aunt—Lord Kintail was the impecunious young nobleman to whom Nigel had referred in his conversation with Mr. Micklejohn at Maple Bank—and the laird of Glen Irvine's little niece, since he had been overheard to say questioningly to himself one day as he chinked a handful of newly-acquired wealth, "Wull it be Miss Marget or Leddy Jean?"

"And whar hae ye been, Nigel Lennox?"

"Just ayont the hills, lad," replied his friend—an answer which fully satisfied Donal, whose geographical conceptions were of the vaguest kind, all the region beyond the mountains that bounded his natural horizon being included by him in this one comprehensive term.

"I'm gaun there mysel ae day," he remarked.

"We'll see aboot that," said Mr. Lennox. "Nae doot ye'll gang ayont the hills some day, Donal, to a bonnier place than Glen Irvine."

"Will that be Lunnon?" questioned Donal.

"There's finer places than Lunnon in the universe of God," answered Nigel. "But I manna keep ye here claverin, callant; yer maister will be expectin' ye."

"Ay; he canna dee lang wi'oot me," said Donal complacently. "Na, na, that canna he," he chuckled to himself as he shuffled away, while Mr. Lennox took the shortest cut back to the Castle. He had ordered an early dinner, intending that afternoon to pay a visit to his sister, Mrs. Cheyne, who was the wife of a farmer in the parish of Murkleton, a small market town which could be reached by train from Blackden in about half an hour. He was looking forward with eagerness to the meeting, yet Jessie Cheyne was a very different personage from the little Jessie Lennox whose companionship was such a pleasant memory of Nigel's boyhood. The wee lassie wi' the lint-white locks who had toddled after him on the braes by Loch Voir side had developed into a shrewish, grasping elderly woman, grown soured and fretful with the cares of a family and a farm—and also a husband who to the meekness of the dove, which he possessed in large measure, certainly did not add the wisdom of the serpent. Robert Cheyne was a shy gentle-natured man, upright and honest as the day,—“ower honest for himsel’,” some of his less scrupulous neighbours called him,—but he lacked those shrewd business

qualities which were the only ones that his wife and her brother shared in common, and consequently he had never been a successful farmer. Trustful and unsuspecting to a fault, he had often been overreached at a bargain by those who excelled him in *pawkiness*, and many were the curtain lectures which his deficiency in that in her eyes all-important respect had entailed on him from Jessie, who was too coarse-grained herself to appreciate his finer characteristics.

Poor Jessie ! She had a great many grievances (by her own account), and one of the sorest was the contrast (heightened when she remembered Nigel's childlessness and her own six sons and daughters) between her brother's wealth and her straitened circumstances. She was convinced that Providence had dealt very mysteriously with her in this matter, and fretted over it in secret as much as she thought allowable in a religious woman, as she considered herself to be ; for Jessie had in her youth "made a profession," though now it was little more than the profession of a profession, and she was careful to observe the proprieties, even to herself.

It was pretty well known, however, that the Cheyne family had largely benefited by their relationship to the rich builder. Nigel Lennox had often made presents of stock to Robert, and come to his assistance more than once in seasons of temporary difficulty ; he had given a handsome marriage portion to Janet, his eldest niece, when she became the wife of a respectable wholesale tradesman in Dundee ; he had provided

Robina, the clever second girl, with an education that had enabled her to take a situation as governess in an Edinburgh family of position ; Malcolm, Jessie's third child and eldest son, was now at Oxford at his uncle's expense, and his next brother, Will, who had a good head for business, was in Lennox & Mortis's Glasgow office. Fifteen-year-old Angus was still at a boarding school, but it was understood that Uncle Nigel would shortly take him by the hand in turn, and only the delicate health of little Margaret, the youngest of the family, had prevented Mr. Lennox from sending her, as he had done her elder sister, to a good school in England. Yet Jessie never thought he had done as much as might have been expected of him, and when simple Robert would remark gratefully on Nigel's goodness to them, she would toss her head and mutter, "Hoot ! It's nae mair than he should do."

Nigel was not blind to her faults, but he loved her in spite of them. Was she not his sister still ? His only sister, too. "Puir Jessie ! She's had a fashious life ; nae wunner she's a bit cankert whiles," he would soliloquize, "and it is but nateral she suld be keen for her bairns' interest ! Ay, ay—puir Jess !"

CHAPTER X.

MRS. CHEYNE'S TEA-TABLE.

A FOOT-PATH through green corn-fields brought Nigel Lennox from the Murkleton Station to the Mains Farm, as his sister's dwelling was called ; it was a homely but substantially built house, standing on a piece of rising ground overlooking a bleak undulating tract of country. He wanted to give the inmates a surprise,—Nigel was as fond of harmless practical jokes as any boy,—so he slipped round to the back of the house, pushed open a door which stood ajar, and found himself in the low-roofed, roomy kitchen. A hearty-looking young woman, his sister's general servant, was standing at the table, busied in some domestic operation, and singing to herself the while—not, I regret to say, one of the ballads of her native land, but a music-hall ditty which had worn out its popularity in the metropolis but was still *encored* at provincial entertainments. Standing with her back to the door, and listening to her own sweet voice, the young lady did not perceive her visitor's presence till he announced it by a slap on her shoulder and a cheery, "Weel, Baubie woman, and hoo's a' wi ye the day?"

"Hoot awa, Mr. Lennox!" cried the girl, turning round with a start. "Eh! but ye gar'd me loup.* We never kent ye were hame."

"Whar's yer mistress?"

"She'll be back eenoo," answered Baubie. "Will I gang and tell her ye're here?"

"Na, na! gang on wi yer wark—I'll mak her loup too. Wha wad ye think I saw in Glasgie yestreen, eh, Baubie?"

"Hoo wad I ken?" returned Baubie with well-feigned indifference.

"Ou ay! ye ken fine," laughed Nigel. "He's getting on brawly, so he tells me; he's wi' one of the heid bakers in Glasgie noo, and thinks o' settin' up for himsel sune. He'll be sendin' for ye to come and help him, I'm thinkin', Baubie."

"Humph! gin he wants me he maun e'en come and fess me," answered Baubie, who was a native of one of the fishing villages on the east coast of Scotland, and had all the blunt independence of manner characteristic of that locality. "I can get as gude as him ony day wi'oot gangin' to Glasgie efter them."

"Baubie! Fa are ye claverin' wi noo?"† called a shrill voice from the *transe*, or passage crossing the house.

"Jist wi your ain brither," Nigel made answer as Mrs. Cheyne appeared in the doorway, a tall, gaunt woman with hair greyer than his own, and a face that

* Made me start.

† Who are you chattering with?

might have been handsome once, but was now wrinkled and forbidding.

"Eh, it's you, is it, Nigel?" she said as her brother wrung her hand in a hearty clasp—he would have kissed her with the best goodwill, but Jessie had long ago repulsed such childish forms of salutation. "Will ye come ben? Rab's gane ower to Blackriggs—he'll be in afore tea. Ye'll stay tea wi' us, of coorse, Nigel?"

"Thankye kindly, Jessie," he replied as he followed her to the parlour and seated himself in the old horse-hair armchair by the fire. "And hoo's a' wi ye?"

"I canna say that a's weel," responded Mrs. Cheyne, who had taken a seat by the table and was now plying her knitting-needles vigorously upon a coarse grey stocking, "for it wadna be the trowth. There's aye something ganging agley. Twa o' the coos deed laist week."

"Hoot awa! That's ill news, Jessie. I houp naether o' them was that young short-horn I gev' ye?"

"Oh! na—she's a' richt."

"Or ony o' yer gweed young coos?" pursued Nigel.

"They were no that young," replied his sister. As a matter of fact the defunct cows had been the two oldest and least valuable on the farm, but Jessie Cheyne always made the most of her losses, especially to her rich brother.

"Daisy's at schuil, I suppose?" was his next remark.

"Ay—she'll sune be hame. Whisht! I'm thinkin' that's her step on the gravel."

"Dinna tell her I'm here!" cried Nigel, getting

behind the door, which was opened the next minute by a fragile-looking little girl, who exclaimed as she threw down her bag of books, "Oh! mamma, Uncle Nigel's at the Castle!"

"Na, he isn't, he's here!" cried Uncle Nigel himself, springing from his place of concealment; whereupon his niece flew into his arms with a shriek of delight, and buried her sweet young face in his great rough beard, while he hugged her and kissed her to his heart's content. Little Margaret, or Daisy as her uncle always called her, was the only one of his sister's family upon whom he felt at liberty to let out the full tide of his affection. Janet and Robina had been even in their childhood staid, sober young damsels, who never seemed to care for any more demonstrative token of love from their warm-hearted old uncle than a formal kiss at meeting and parting; but "wee Daisy" never looked so happy as when she was cuddled up in Uncle Nigel's big strong arms, or tripping at his side with her hand clasped in his.

"Let's see if ye're grown, Daisy-chain," he said, holding her out at arm's length. "Na, not a bit of ye! Wha wad think ye were thirteen? Never mind, she's little and good."

"Ye clean spoil her, Nigel!" said her mother. She spoke reprovingly, but there was a softening of her harsh expression as her eye rested on her youngest and best-loved child. "Go and put off your things, Margaret," she continued, "and then you must help Baubie get the tea. She's ower thrang the day, and

she's aye compleenin' o' the wark, the idle taupie.* And sae impident forbye! I wunner what servants are coming till. But there, ye ken naething about thae kin' o' troubles, Nigel; Mrs. Elworthy takes a' that gear aff yer hands. It's fine to be you!" And Mrs. Cheyne heaved a deep sigh. It may here be remarked that her private intercourse with her brother was conducted upon a fixed principle, from which—regarding her relationship to the rich contractor as a solemn responsibility, which it was her duty to utilise to the utmost for the benefit of her family—she never varied.

In the town of Murkleton Jessie Cheyne laid claim to a certain amount of gentility; she visited with the wives of the local ministers and professional men, and sent Margaret to the little "Ladies' School" which their daughters attended. But with Nigel she always talked her broadest Scotch, and paraded rather than concealed her homely domestic arrangements. It was well for him, she argued, to be reminded of the rock whence he was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence he was digged, and she took care never to let him forget that while he was rolling in riches his only sister was but a toiling farmer's wife, who had a hard struggle to make both ends meet, and to whom his wealth would be only a standing grievance unless it was available to her whenever money happened to be scarce at The Mains.

Had Nigel been a pompous, self-important man, vain
Taupie, a lazy girl.

of the position to which he had risen, and scornful of the lowly estate whence he had sprung, Jessie would have altered her tactics; she would have tried as far as possible to sink the plebeian and assume the lady, and would have treated him with becoming deference and humility. But Mrs. Cheyne was a woman who always cut her coat according to her cloth: knowing how her brother loved plain speaking and abhorred toadyism, she determined that he should have none of the latter from her; her ordinary manner towards him was blunt and off-hand when not fretful and aggrieved, and she was always ready to criticise him to his face with the most sisterly frankness.

She had just fitted the teapot with the old red cosy which had kept Robert Cheyne's tea warm during all the days of his married life, when the click of the garden gate announced the return of the (nominal) master of the establishment.

"There's papa!" cried Margaret; "I'll run and meet him, and tell him Uncle Nigel's here."

"Na, na! Bide here. Ye'll tak' cauld rinnin' oot wi'oot yer hat," commanded her mother, who had special reasons for desiring a private word with her husband before he met Nigel, and stepping hastily out of the room she met Mr. Cheyne half-way down the garden-path.

Robert Cheyne was a spare elderly man, with an habitually depressed look on his long thin face. His wife had often been heard to say when recounting some domestic trouble that "Rob was sair hadden doon

about it," but those who knew the family averred that Rob was more "hadden doon" by Jessie herself than by any other cause. Certainly there was more of apprehension than of pleasure in the start he gave as his better half suddenly confronted him with a portentous air. Poor man! he was still smarting from the effects of a severe "hearing" which she had given him only the day before, consequent on a confession he had felt bound to make to her. Several months previously he had in a moment of weak good-nature consented to become surety for a neighbour to the amount of £600, saying nothing of the matter to Jessie, as he was convinced that his friend's credit was unimpeachable, and that he would never be called on for the money. But within the last few days news had reached him which had led him to fear that his confidence was misplaced, and poor Robert had in fear and trembling confided his folly to his wife, who forthwith exhausted her vocabulary in terms expressive of his utter senselessness. He looked up at her now (he was a little man, and she towered above him) half expecting to be blamed for something or other, and was exceedingly relieved at the first words that fell from her lips.

"Nigel's here!" she announced—"I'll contrive for ye to hae a crack wi'm efter tae, Rob, or if we canna manage that ye maun gang wi'm to the station, and ye maun tell him fat a fule ye've been aboot that sax hunner pun'."

"Eh! Jessie, I wadna like to tell him. It was bad eneuch to me to tell ye."

"Ye gomerall!* Hooever dee ye think we'll win ower sic a loss gin he disna help's?"

"It's no likely we'll hae to pay't ava, by what I've just heard, so ye can mak yersel easy, my woman."

"I'd mak mysel a hantle easier gin Nigel kent o't. It wad be naething to him to pit his han' in's pooch and gi'e ye the sax hunner pun doon, and sae save ye a' further anxiety."

"But I dinna like to be aye seekin' his help," protested Rob.

"Wha bad ye seek his help, ye gowk? ye hae but to tell him your deeficulty and leave him tae act in a Christian-like way."

"But I dinna think——"

"Ye needna think aboot it ava. Jist dee as I tell ye, or ye'll repent it in the en'!"

"Cud ye na speyk till'm aboot it yoursel', Jessie, since ye feel the necessity for't sae pooerfully?" Rob ventured to suggest, but his wife received the proposal with indignation. "Was *he* never to undertake anything disagreeable for the good of his family?" she enquired, with such cutting emphasis that poor Rob subsided with his usual formula on such occasions, "Weel, weel, hae yer wull, Jessie woman."

"Is this all ye're gaun to give Nigel for his tae?" asked Mr. Cheyne, as they gathered round the tea-table, which showed no addition to its ordinary fare of home-made bread and butter and oatmeal bannocks.

"Hoot, Rob, ye ken Nigel aye likes to tak' pot-luck

* Idiot.

wi's," said Jessie jocularly. "Baubie hadna time to bak' ony scones the day."

"But I believe there's some of Janet's Dundee cake in the press," said Rob. "Get it oot, Marget, my dear, and some jam."

"Dinna fash yoursel's for me!" said Nigel. "I can eat onything, and the plainer the better. What do ye think I had to my breakfast this morning? naething but parritch and milk!"

"A' the mair rizzon ye should mak' a guid tae," said his hospitable brother-in-law.

"We micht hae had some eggs though," remarked Mrs. Cheyne, as though the idea had just occurred to her; "ye aye likit oor black hen's eggs, Nigel. Rin oot to Baubie, Margaret, and bid her boil twa or three."

"The demikie isna luikin' ower stoot," observed her uncle, as she flew to execute her commission.

"She's had a cauld," said Jessie; "I aften think the air here's ower keen and blusterin' for her. Ye're mair sheltered at Glen Irvine, tho' ye're on higher ground."

"Lat her come back with me for a week," proposed Mr. Lennox. "The cheenge wad dee her gude."

"Eh, thank ye, Nigel; I dinna ken aboot that, though," said his sister doubtfully. She was a woman who always liked, as her neighbours would say, to "argle-bargle" about any moot point, even when she intended to give in at last.

"Hoots, Jessie, why for no?" asked her spouse.

"Miss Rettie disna like her bein' awa frae her schuil," Jessie said.

"Mak' my compliments to Miss Rettie," said Nigel, "and tell her she maun excuse the lassie for a week, during which I'll be very pleased if she'll come and spend a day at the Castle and bring a' the young leddies with her."

"You'll let me go, won't you, mamma?" pleaded the person most concerned, who had returned from the kitchen in time to hear part of the discussion. Her occasional visits to her uncle's lordly home were always seasons of intense enjoyment to Daisy, including as they generally did, among other delights, accommodation in a splendid bedroom the like of which was not to be seen in all Murkleton, with a smart maid to wait upon her, unlimited spoiling by her uncle and grandmother and her uncle's fine English housekeeper; and a probable invitation to Crannoch House to spend an afternoon with the little Ladies Grizel and Isobel Mauchlin.

"Weel—I daursay it'll be a pleasure to your grandma to see you," Mrs. Cheyne consented slowly: she always accepted a favour as though she were conferring one.

"That will it," said her brother.

"I aften think," Jessie remarked presently, "that Mither maun be unco' lanesome when ye're awa."

"She's never tauld me sae," answered Mr. Lennox, with a look of surprise. "She aye says her buiks are fine company till her; and the leddies o' the kintraside are aye linkin' in to speer hoo she is, and she has the best o' attendants in auld Christian."

"Still, that's no like her ain family," persisted Jessie. 'I wuss I had the time to gang ower aftener to Glen

Irvine. Hoo wad it be, Nigel, if Mither cam' to live wi' us? Me and Marget wad be aye at han' then tae atten' till her."

"Is *that* fat ye're drivin' at?" asked Nigel. "Na, na, Jessie, that wunna dee. I'll gie ye onything ye like tae ask in rizzon, even to the half of my kingdom, as the King said in the Bible, but I'll no pairt wi Mither while I hae a roof to shelter her; that is to say, unless she leaves me o' her ain wull and choice."

"And I'm sure, Jessie," put in Rob, who had been thinking that his wife was far from showing her usual sagacity on this occasion, "we may be vera thankful that Nigel has the pooer and the will to gie yer mither sic a hame as he does. We cudna weel afford to keep her ourselves, though if she had nae ither place to gang till I wad mak her kindly welcome here."

"Of coorse, Rob, I didna suppose but what Nigel wad share the expenses if he consentit to mak' the arrangement, in Mither's interest; but he maun please himsel," was Jessie's rejoinder.

"Tak anither egg, Nigel," said his brother-in-law.

"Thank ye—I wunner hoo 'tis that your eggs hae sic a superior flavour tae oors at Glen Irvine. Cud ye spare me a dizzen to tak hame, Jessie?"

"I daursay I cud," replied Mrs. Cheyne.

"Let's see—fat's the market price o' eggs the noo?" enquired Nigel, putting his hand into his pocket.

"Buff and nonsense, Nigel!" cried Robert. "Dinna speyk aboot market prices atween you and me. Ye're welcome tae onything we can gie ye."

"Hoots, Rob!" said his wife, with an admonitory frown. "Ye ken vera weel that Nigel aye likes to dee things in a beesnis-like way. New-laid eggs were sellin' at a shilling in Murkleton yestreen."

"Can ye gi'e me cheenge for half-a-croon, Jessie? I'm nae worth a shilling."

Jessie began to rummage in her purse. "I dinna think I can," she said, eyeing the half-crown in her brother's hand greedily.

"I wud say, never mind the cheenge, Jessie," said he, "but as Rob says, I aye like to dee things in a beesnis-like way—else I get wrang in my accounts."

Robert put his hand into his own pocket and then half withdrew it, not quite sure whether Jessie would like him to put his finger in the pie. He was still hesitating when his daughter, innocent of everything but the desire to oblige Uncle Nigel, produced the required "change" from her own small purse, an arrangement with which her "mamma" was obliged to be content.

"Ye'll be able to get them nearer ye noo," Mrs. Cheyne remarked as she appropriated the shilling, "for Rob gave a kipple o' oor young fooles to your tenant Gibbie Macfie laist Setterday, just for deein' him a neighbourly turn at Blackden market—a vera unnecessar piece o' generosity I consider't."

"Ah weel, it's a pleasure to be free handit whiles,

eh, Rob?" said Nigel, who generally took Mr. Cheyne's part when Jessie lectured him.

"A pleasure mony folks maun dee wi'oot," she answered for him tartly.

"Hae ye nae news to gie me o' yer ither bairns?" Nigel asked, gliding into a more agreeable subject.

"Janet's weans have got the whooping-cough, the *kinkhost* as we used to call it," replied Jessie.

"Bid her send them doon to the Castle for cheenge of air as sune as she likes," said Nigel.

"Aw believe Malcolm's tellt ye that he thinks o' seekin' ordination in the Church of England?" said Robert.

"That has he!" said Nigel, rubbing his hands with a gratified air. "Fat say ye tae it, Robbie, man?"

"We are weel eneuch pleased," answered Mr. Cheyne, fearful of Jessie's taking it amiss that her opinion had not been asked as well as his. "No but that I micht hae preferred to see him in the meenistry o' oor ain kirk, but as I was sayin tae oor meenister yestreen, it's a' ae flock tho' there's many folds, and gif the lad serves his Heavenly Maister weel I'll no fash mysel' about the field he warks in."

"Thank ye, Rob," said Nigel warmly. "I'm glad ye dinna grudge him tae us. Mac's a gey guid lad, an' a credit tae's feyther."

"Some of the girls at school were saying," put in Margaret, "that if Mac goes into the English Church he may be a Dean or a Bishop some day."

"Sae he micht!" said Jessie complacently. "At

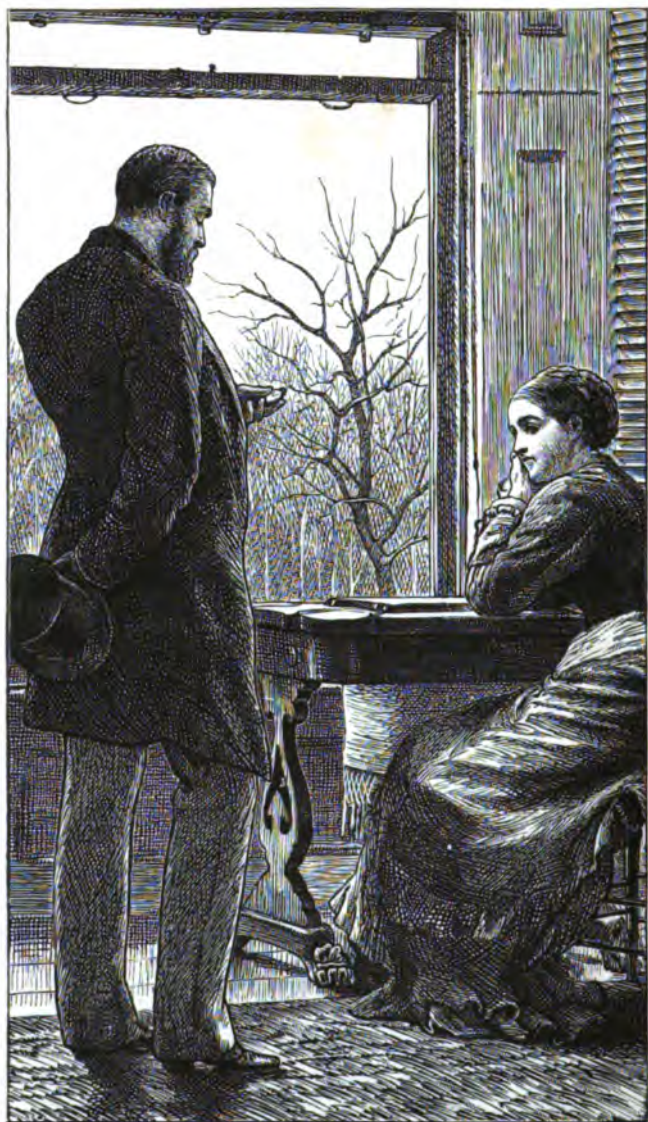
any rate," she added, with a half-jocular air, "he has an uncle that can big him a kirk if he canna come at ane ony ither gate. It wadna be the first ye had biggit, Nigel." Mrs. Cheyne considered that since her son had obliged his uncle so much as to don the livery of the Church of Nigel's adoption (though Nigel had never tried to influence his decision) the least he could do would be to assist Malcolm to some handsome preferment; indeed, had he proposed to endow a new bishopric, build a cathedral, and procure the installation of his nephew as first occupant of the see, she would probably have opined that it was "nae mair than he should dee." Mr. Lennox, however, thought otherwise.

"Hoot awa, Jessie woman!" he exclaimed. "There's ower mony grey-heidit labourers that hae borne the burden and heat o' the day wuntin' kirks that we suld think o' them for unfledged callants like oor Mac. The first thing I'll dee for him will be to recommen' him as curate to some guid hardworkin' mon i' the east end o' Lunnon."

"Eh! Nigel," cried Jessie in dismay. "Ye seerly wadna send the puir laddie to yon awfu' east en' o' Lunnon—he wad dwine awa in a twal'month."

"Tut, Jessie, the east-end's no fat it ance was, and gif it was, 'twad tak mair than twal'months o't to sen' a stoot young chiel like Mac intil a decline.—Hoo's Will gettin' on?"

"Eh, I'm glad ye mentioned him, Nigel. I was gaun to ask ye if ye cudna speyk to Mr. Mortis no to mak'



"IT'S JUST SAX BY THE RIGHT TIME!"

[Page 135.]

him clerk o' the works at Castle Fruachan, as he talks o' doin'. I'm tauld it's just awful on yon island, sae cauld, and sae lanesome, and sic a meeserable inn to lodge in, and the folks a' speykin' Gaelic—the lad doesna like tae object himsel', but considerin' he's yere nevy, he micht jist send him to some place that's no sae unwaurylly."

"I canna interfere wi' Mr. Mortis aboot the like o' that," replied Nigel decidedly.

"And you and him sic friends!" said Jessie.

"We wadna lang be friends at that rate. Na, na; if Will is to get his leevin' in the concern he maun tak' the rauch wi' the smooth, and gang whar he's sent like ony ither servant.—Is your clock right, Jessie?"

"Na, it's fast, I aye pit the clocks on, or that lazy cuttie Baubie wad never gang forret wi' her wark."

"I wadna gar my clocks tell lees if I were you, Jessie," said her brother, as he pushed back his chair and drew out his own watch. "'Leal heart never leed.' It's just sax by the right time. That'll gi'e us an oor till the seven o'clock train."

"Come then, Margaret," said Mrs. Cheyne, "you and me will gang and pack your bag for the lad to take to the station, while yer feyther and uncle hae a crack. It will do ye gweed, auld man," she added, turning to her husband with an unwontedly affectionate look and tone. "Ye're no that weel the day. Ye're tired wi' yer lang walk, and ye're hadden doon aboot ither things forbye."

"Ye maun baith come and spend a day or twa wi'

me neist week," Nigel said, "and fess Daisy hame. There'll be naebody to put ye oot, Rob." Mr. Lennox would not have hesitated for a moment to introduce his homely brother-in-law to the most distinguished of his friends, but Rob himself, being a shy, timid man, always shrank from society in which he felt like a fish out of water. With Jessie it was different; she liked nothing better than to foregather with persons so far above her in the social scale as her brother's guests often were, and Nigel, knowing this, took care to invite her to the Castle when it was full of visitors as well as when he had it to himself.

Mrs. Cheyne looked into the kitchen before going upstairs. "Ye needna tak awa the tea-things till Mr. Lennox is gone, Baubie," she said to her domestic, determined that Rob should have full allowance of time for the communication she intended him to make. "And he's to tak a dizzen o' oor eggs hame wi'm—pit ye them up or he's ready to start."

"Will I pit up a hale dizzen?" asked Baubie, "or will ye coont the twa he had for's tae amang them?"

"Ye'll do as I bid ye," answered her mistress peremptorily. "When I say a dizzen, I mean a dizzen." And she stalked away, without affecting to notice her handmaiden's sly cut at her "close" propensities, or to hear her muttered retort that "some folks coonted thirteen to the dizzen."

CHAPTER XI

MR. CHEYNE WASTES AN OPPORTUNITY.

“WHEEL, Rob!” said Nigel cheerily, as soon as he found himself alone with his brother-in-law, “and fat’s wrang wi’ ye, mon? Ye luik unco’ gruesome!”

“I wat I do,” was Rob’s reply. “There’s mony things, Nigel, to mak a mon wi’ a faimily feel anxious. Whiles I’m feart I’ll no be able to haud my heid abune watter in a whilie. They say we’ll no hae a good hairst this year.”

“Hoo do they ken?” said Nigel. “Ye farmer bodies are aye propheseein’ ill. Cheer up, mon!”

“Easier said than deen, whiles,” sighed Cheyne.

“Hoots! Ye ken I wadna let ye come to want—my ain brither. Ye’re owre careful and troubled, Rab. Ye mind Jock Micklejohn’s story o’ the auld wife wha said when she was bidden to trust in Providence and cross the ferry, ‘I’ll no trust in Providence while there’s a brig at Ayr—she had grippet a truth by the wrang handle, puir body—I tell ye, ye needna distrust Providence while ye hae a brither at Glen Irvine.”

“Ye’re owre guid, Nigel,” said Robert, looking up at

his brother-in-law with the admiring affection a feeble desponding nature often feels for a strong bright one.

"I wuss I was mair o' a credit to ye."

"Havers!" cried Nigel abruptly. "I wudna wuss ye a greater credit till me than ye are, honest man."

"There yere kind heart spok, Nigel, but it aften irks me to think that Jessie hasna the poseetion she suld have as your sister. As far as this warld's gear gangs, she wad hae done better to hae taen Jock Micklejohn than me." For Jock, when a struggling student, had aspired to the hand of Miss Lennox, only to be scornfully rejected by that worldly-wise young lady. "And the bairns forbye," continued Cheyne, "I wuss I cud hae deen mair for them!"

"Buff and nonsense! What better cud ye hae deen for them than gien them a douce Christian example and upbringing? That's worth a' the dirty tocher that folks mak sae muckle adee about!"

"Only they micht think, if I'd been a mair cawpable mon," Rob was beginning; but Nigel interrupted him with, "Cawpable mon, indeed! There's mair lack o' honest men in the warld than o' cawpable anes, and I tell ye what, Rob, a mon's bairns cudna say a prooder thing o'm than yours can o' you—that though you've aiblins tint a pun' noo and than through ither fowks' cheaterie, ye never won ae bawbee through your ain. Gif I hear ony o' your lads or lasses cast a reflection on you, nae a plack sall they get frae me, I'se warran' them!"

"They've no been fin'in' faut," said their father.

"They're vera gude bairns, especially Mac and Marget. I thank ye for yer guid opingon o' me, Nigel. I wuss I cud tak' a mair cheerfu' view o' things. But I was aye of a carkin' natur'."

Nigel had been walking up and down the room for the last minute or two—he never could bear to stay long in one position. He stopped now beside his brother-in-law's chair, and, laying his hand on his shoulder, said, "Robert Cheyne, fat richt hae we that ca' oorsels' Christian men to be girning and sighin' and forecastin' ills as gif we had nae Father in heaven to care for us, and nae Elder Brither that kens oor griefs and carries oor sorrows? See here!" and taking a Bible from the shelf, Mr. Lennox turned to the fourteenth of St. John; "He says, '*Let not your heart be troubled.*' Fat richt hae ye to disobey His plain commands?"

Cheyne did not answer, but sat with his eyes fixed on the speaker, as though a new light had broken in upon the subject. He was a sincerely pious man, and Nigel's words had touched an answering chord. "*I go to prepare a place for you,*" Nigel read on, following the words with his finger. "Fat kin' o' fules are we that say we believe He's gettin' ready a braw hoose for's up yonner, a' gowd and precious stanes, and canna trust Him to keep the bit placies we live in doon here abune oor heids, or to satisfie oor wants while we're in them? We're just like menseless bairns that I've seen, greetin' and thinkin' their feyther had clean deserted them whan he hed but gane oot to procure a better hame for them than that they were in."

A faint, watery smile passed over Robert Cheyne's features. "It's fine to hear ye talk, Nigel," he said, "and I houp I may profit by yer sizzonable discourse. But ye canna expeck me to feel sae confident aboot the future as a mon like yersel, that hasna a wish on-gratified."

Nigel gave a short laugh—a *grey* laugh the Scotch call it. "Is that a' ye ken, mon? Why, I envy *ye* whiles, Rob. There's things ye hae that I hanna."

"Noo, Nigel!" cried Rob, looking up incredulously. "Hoo do ye mak' that oot?"

"Easy eneuch," replied Nigel, "though you're the first I've said it tae. Hae na ye a wife and bairns? Eh! ye dinna ken hoo lanesome I feel whiles—no at Glen Irvine, because there I hae Mither, but some nichts when I'm alane in ane o' my big hooses in Lunnon or Glasgie, Jock Micklejohn aff on some ploy o's ain, and nane to hae a crack wi' me or say as much as 'A penny for your thochts, Nigel,' I feel as though I could cheenge places wi' the puirest day-darger that has a gude-wife and weans to welcome him when he gangs hame at e'enin'."

"Eh! Nigel, I never kent that," said Robert, putting his hand sympathizingly into that of his brother-in-law, who grasped it with a warmth that sent a tinge of colour into the other's pale cheeks, and a thrill of pleasure into his downcast spirit at the thought that he could be of any help or comfort to Nigel. "I wonder de dinna marry again," he incautiously remarked. It was well that Jessie did not hear him—Jessie, whose

one dread was lest her brother should ever be so demented as to take to himself a second wife, and thus place an obstacle in the way of her children's future enjoyment of his possessions.

"Me marry again!" laughed the millionaire. "Fat leddy wad care to marry me, I wunner?—and I hae seen ower muckle o' leddies to be content wi' onything less at this time o' day. Na, na! It's no' aften I hae these fits, and when they come on I just say to mysel', 'Nigel, ye unthankful auld sinner, ye bude to tak' shame to yersel, sittin' compleenin' that gait whan ye hae sae mony blessings! There's Ane that cares for ye, auld lad, tho' ye are but the least o' His servan's, and some day He'll fess ye hame to see His face, and then"—and Nigel began to walk about the room, singing,—

" 'The morning shall awaken,
The shadows shall decay,
And each true-hearted servant
Shall shine as doth the day.
For He whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known,
And they who know and see Him
Shall have Him for their own.' "

"Gin I had but your faith, Nigel," Robert was beginning, but Nigel hastily stopped him. "Dinna speyk about *my* faith, mon! Whiles I dinna seem to hae as muckle as a grain of mustard-seed. Warks I may hae, tak' them for what they're worth, but——"

"Warks, hae ye, Nigel?" asked Jessie, entering the room at that moment, and catching at the only word in

his sentence which sounded to her of any practical importance. "Are ye buildin' onything noo? If ye are, ye micht just hae gien Will the owersicht o't, instead o' sendin' him aff to yon unwaurly place."

To her surprise her brother burst into a hearty fit of laughing, and even Rob gave a faint chuckle. "It's no that kin' o' warks Nigel was alluding tae," he said.

At another time Jessie might have felt affronted at not being enlightened as to the cause of their mirth, but just now her mind was filled with one engrossing subject; namely, the result of the interview. She scanned her husband's face sharply, and judging from its unwontedly cheerful expression that it had been a successful one, her own spirits rose, and she remarked pleasantly, "Ye're luikin' better, guid-man!"

"Nigel and me hae had a fine confab," he replied.

"Ay, a crack wi' Nigel aye does ye gweed," said Mrs. Cheyne, with increasing satisfaction. "I'm sure I'm much obleeged till ye, Nigel. I'm thinkin' you and Margaret will be needin' your time. She's quite ready."

Jessie took leave of her brother with more warmth of manner than she usually displayed. As soon as he was fairly out of the house, she turned to Mr. Cheyne with the laconic inquiry, "Weel?"

"Weel?" returned Rob, vaguely guessing at her meaning.

"Hoot! ye ken fat I mean. What did Nigel say?"

"Say! I wuss ye had heard 'm, Jessie. Whiles I think Nigel's ower gweed for——"

"Hoots! It's nae mair than he should be tae's ain

flesh and bluid," interrupted Jessie. "I houp ye didna tell him sae. Fat's he gaun to dee?"

"Fat about?"

"Man! Ye're unco' dottled the nicht. Fat did he say when ye tell't him about the sax hunner poun'?"

"Eh! dear, I clean forgat it. We were speikin' o' better things."

Mrs. Cheyne's face may be more easily imagined than described. "Ye dinna mean to tell me," she shrieked, "that ye sat claverin' wi' Nigel a' that stricken half-oor, and me spinnin' oot the time upstairs to gie ye mair opportunity, and never minted ae word o' the vera thing he bude to ken? Weel-a-wat! I think ye're gane clean wud. Ye never had muckle *nous*, Robert Cheyne (and I had little eneuch mysel' the I day married ye), but this beats a'!"

"Eh, Jessie, gin ye had heard Nigel ye wadna speak that gait. 'Twas better than siller or gowd to listen till 'm the noo."

Jessie's eyes followed the direction of her husband's, and rested on the open Bible which Nigel had left lying on the table. "Humph!" she cried, with a snort and a toss of her head, "Nigel was settin' up tae expoun the Scriptures, was he? A fine han' he wad be at it—him that canna expleen a chapter at his ain faimily worship. Gin ye wunted releegious instruction ye micht hae gane to yer meenister or to ane of Nigel's fine deans and bishops that are aye stoppin' at the Castle. Fat kens Nigel o' theology? He's just an ignorant body. An ye, I dootna, sat listenin' tae his

blethers as meek as a bairn at skweel. I'm a releegious wumman mysel', I houp, but fech ! there's a time for a' things, and it's just abusin' the gifts o' Proavidence when ye've the fear o' ruin starin' ye in the face, and Nigel rowlin' in riches, never to gie 'm the opportunity o' len'in' ye a han'. Ye auld doited sumph !" *

Jessie paused a moment to take breath, and then went on again, "Nigel micht be thankful to be pit in the wye o' helpin' ye. He thinks a hantle o' helpin' folks that are nae kin tae 'm. 'Twas 's ain gude warks, I suppose, he was braggin' o' whan I cam' in the noo, and ye baith laughed in sic an onmannerly wye !"

"He wusna braggin' o' them," said Rob. "It's because he sets sae little value on them that he didna mind speikin' aboot them. Nigel thinks nae mair o' spendin' a thoosan puns in charity than ye wad o' giein' a burnt bannock tae a beggar."

"And it's lang sin' ye saw me dee that !" returned Jessie. "'The last ane I offered tae a trampin' wife she just swore black oot at me, and said she'd been tauld I was ane that aye luikit at the twa sides of a bannock afore I pairted wi't—the ill-tongued jaud !"

"Puir misguidet body !" said Rob.

If he had offered his pity to his wife she would probably have rejected it with scorn, but now she turned round upon him wrathfully.

"'Deed, an' twad be mair sense (only ye never had ony) tae peety me instead o' the like o' yon. Wi' ye and Nigel it mak's na hoo ill-conducket folks are—they're

* Simpleton.

a' 'puir bodies' and 'peer stocks.' But that's the wye wi' men!"

And Mrs. Cheyne gave a disdainful snort, intended for the male sex in general. It was a fixed theory with her that men as a rule were "menseless bodies"; indeed, in her private judgment Robert, Nigel, and Jock Micklejohn together, with Daft Donald thrown in, had not the gumption between them of one sensible woman like herself.

"Ye men bodies aye begin at the wrang en' o' things," she declared, as she restored the Bible to its place with rather more force and less reverence than was due. "Sin' ye and Nigel are sae fond o' the Bible at a' times and sizzons, I wuss ye wad baith tak' tent that the Bible says, 'If a mon provides not for his own house he's worse than an infidel!'" And with this parting shot Jessie stalked out of the room.

Her husband rose slowly, lit his pipe, and went out for a turn in the twilight. "Puir Jessie!" he sighed to himself, as he strolled along the road outside his gate; "I dootna but I'm a sair fash tae her. I wad like to see her wi' less o' the *Martha* speerit; but I houp the root o' the matter's in her—puir Jessie!"

CHAPTER XII.

LUX LUCET IN TENEBRIS.

"DAFT DONAL'" stood staring in at one of the latticed windows of the Glen Irvine Village Institute. He had made out that there was a new picture hanging up inside—a tall photograph in an Oxford frame, but the subject of it puzzled him, and he looked round to see if the minister or any other person from whom he might seek information was passing by. Suddenly his face expanded into the broadest of grins ; Donald had espied his friend Nigel Lennox, accompanied by his young niece, turning the corner by the manse, and he shambled forward to meet them with outstretched hand.

"Gude morning to ye, Nigel Lennox ! Eh ! Miss Marget, hoo are ye the day ? I'm glad to see ye, Miss Marget, if naebody else is ! I'm sayin', Nigel Lennox, Wha's yon wi' the booet ?" And Donald pointed over his shoulder towards the window through which he had been gazing. Nigel Lennox, well used to hearing the word *booet* applied to a lantern, understood at once that the poor lad referred to the copy of *The Light of the World* which he himself had sent to the Institute only

the day before ; in fact, he was now on his way thither to see if it had been hung in accordance with his directions. A smaller photograph of the same subject in a carved ivory frame had just been the means of gratifying a long-cherished wish of Margaret's.

"It's Ane that comes to seek us oot, lad," he said in reply to Donald's question. "Ane that can see ye and me when we're no seein' Him, and that'll ken gif we're deein' onything wrang."

"Wull He ?" asked Donald, with an awestruck look. "Does He gang roun' to see ? I'm aye frichtit whan the maister gaes roun' wi's booet o' nichts, for fear I've forgotten onything. Ae nicht I forgat to steek the yett,* and the young stirk gat oot, and wasna he in a tirry-vee ! † Wull Yon be angert gin He fin's onything amiss ?"

"Puir laddie, I've begun to expleen tae ye at the wrang en'," said his friend kindly. "See here, Donal'. Gif ye were sittin' a' yer lane in the mirk, wad ye no be glad for some ane to come in wi' a booet and lichten up the place for ye ?"

"Fine wad I !" replied Donald grinning. "I aften feel lanesome o' nichts efter I'm gane till my bed i' the loft."

"Weel, Donal', Yon there is aye willin' to come and keep folks company whan they're alane or dowie. He'll come to ye if ye'll hae Him. Ye canna see Him, but ye can speyk to Him, and He'll hear ye."

"Do ye ken Him, Nigel Lennox ?"

* Gate.

† A fit of temper.

"Aye, lad; He's my best Friend."

"Do ye ever feel lanesome?" questioned Donald again.

"Whiles, lad."

"I wad come and sit wi' ye," Donald volunteered.

"Thank ye, Donal'; but what wad the nowt dee wuntin' ye?"

"Eh, I forgot them," said Donald, feeling that this settled the question; adding, "And gin ye hae Him wi' the booet ye wunna need me."

"Vera true, lad," said Nigel solemnly. "But come ye in wi' us and look at the picture nearer."

Donald, much gratified by this invitation, shuffled into the Institute in the rear of his friends, and, taking up his position opposite the photograph, gazed at it in silence for a few seconds.

"Fat do they ca' Yon?" he inquired at length.

"He suld be nae Straunger to ye, laddie," answered Mr. Lennox, "for ye hae aften heard the meenister speyk o' Him at the kirk."

"Eh! Is't Himsel'?" cried the poor fellow eagerly. "Ye ken Wha I mean," he went on, turning confidentially to the millionaire, and dropping his voice to an awestruck whisper—"The minister said I shudna be aye speikin' His name, it wasna *reverent*; but I've kent Him lang syne. And yon's Him! But I didna ken He gaed roun wi' a booet," he added thoughtfully.

"The picture doesna mean that He's to be seen in that form, Donal'," said Nigel. "It's to teach us that He sees a' things and mak's the dark places licht. And

He brings anither kin' o' licht, forbye the licht in the booet. Fat do ye see roon His heid, Donal'?"

"A croon," replied Donald.

"Weel, I see twa, a croon o' gowd and a croon o' ——"

"Brammles?" suggested Donald.

"Oh! Donald," cried Daisy, much shocked; "you should call them ——"

"Whisht, whisht, Daisy!" interposed her uncle. "Didna fash the puir callant wi' words and names, seein' he's got a grip o' the main trowth. Brammles bear thorns, ony gate. Luik at yon bonnie licht abune His head, lad," he continued to Donald. "It's a saft red licht in the painting. That shows us that He, the King of all, was crowned with thorns for you and me, Donal'. That teaches us that He loves us, and the licht in the booet that He ——"

"Luiks efter us," said his pupil, as Nigel paused for a suitable form of expression.

"That's it, my man. It tells us that He'll see if ye negleck the coos, or if I'm cross and cankert, or if Daisy here" (and he put his arm round the slight form at his side) "reads story-books when she should be learning her lessons."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Daisy, blushing at being thus reminded of her peccadilloes.

"Weel, weel, Daisy-chain, we'll try to overcome oor fauts, wunna we? And noo, Donal', I'm thinkin' ye've heard eneuch for ae day; neist time I'll tell ye fat the lave o't means."

"Eh! that'll be fine!" chuckled Donald. "I'll no forget what ye've tell't me the day. But I'm fain to see Himsel' ance," the halflin said regretfully, pausing in the doorway for one more look at the picture.

"Ye wull dee that, lad," said Nigel Lennox.

"Poor Donald!" said Daisy, as he walked away muttering to himself.

"Puir Donal'? Rich Donal', I wad say, lassie. It wad be weel if a'budy kent as muckle as yon honest lad does. There's better gear in his heart than in mony wise men's heads, Daisy-chain."

When Mr. and Mrs. Cheyne paid their promised visit to Nigel in the following week, they were both happily in a much more cheerful frame of mind than when they last parted from him. The person for whom Robert had signed the bond had set all doubts at rest by paying the six hundred pounds, and Jessie, freed from present anxiety, was able to enjoy to the full the gratification (and it was no small one to her) of driving through Blackden in her brother's carriage-and-pair. But a cloud, though as yet no bigger than a man's hand, rose on her horizon as she took off her bonnet in her daughter's room.

Daisy had been displaying her new picture, and was somewhat disappointed by the qualified admiration her "mamma" bestowed upon it. "Hum! It's a handsome frame. Yer uncle will have paid a deal for it. He wad have shown mair sense if he had bought ye a new hat."

"I would much rather have this, mamma. Uncle Nigel says it is to be hung up in my room."

"It would be mair suitable for the drawing-room," said Mrs. Cheyne. "Though I canna say that I care for these fanciful, allegorical sort of pictures. Give me a plain Scripture scene that a body can tell the meaning of at a glance."

"I think the meaning of this is plain enough, mamma," said Margaret seriously. "And I have been copying a piece from one of Mr. Ruskin's books that explains it beautifully. Here it is—no, stop—I have given you the wrong one; that is Uncle Nigel's."

"Your uncle didna write this," said her mother, as she glanced over the sheet of paper which Daisy had handed to her.

"Oh, no! a young lady he knows in England wrote that out for him after they had been to see some pictures together."

"Hum! I wunner what young leddy that was?"

"She is a Miss Hastings; uncle met her at Stockhampton," answered Margaret. "He says she is very good, and very clever too. She wrote that beautiful book grandma gave me on my last birthday."

"Ou ay," grunted Jessie, with a sharp, uneasy look, as of one who scents danger in the wind. "Perhaps your uncle wad like to have the copy you made of this long screed and let you keep the other," she suggested, hoping to gain some idea of the depth of Nigel's interest in his new friend. "He thinks a hantle of anything done by you."

"I know he would not part with his own," said Daisy decidedly, "for he values it very much; he thought it so kind of Miss Hastings to write it out and send it to him."

"Eh! she corresponds with him, does she?" cried Jessie. "Weel-a-wat! Set your Uncle Nigel up wi' young leddies!" she muttered. "At his time o' life it wad become him to be thinkin' o' better things."

Mrs. Cheyne lost no time in bringing about (apparently quite by accident) a private interview with her brother, when she commenced operations by thanking him for the handsome present he had given to Daisy. "She's gey pleased wi't, and the frame's a fine piece of carving—I only hope Baubie winna brak't when she's dustin'. When I have time I must read that quotation from Mr. Ruskin that she's copied out; I thought she'd done it vera neatly."

"That has she!" said Nigel.

"That was a bonny handwritin' ye gave her to copy frae," pursued his sister, working round gradually to the point.

"Ay, and the leddy wha's it is does mony ither bonny things. I wad like to see Daisy grow up her marrow."

"Some leddy ye foregathered wi' at Stockhampton, was it?"

"Ay, I micht ca' her a sort of relation, for her brother-in-law, Mr. Langhorne, is my cousin on my ain mother's side. She's a gey gude lassie. Her and me were unco' canty together."

"I houp, Nigel," said Jessie, in a tone of serious admonition, "that ye tak' tent of hoo ye act when ye're wi' young leddies. Some of them are unco' kittle cattle, and wad mak' on that ye had promised to marry them if ye did but say a ceevil word to them; sae jist tak' ye my advice and haena ower muckle to dee wi' them."

Nigel burst into a hearty laugh, which helped considerably to allay Mrs. Cheyne's fears. "Hoot toot, Jessie woman!" he cried. "Ye're no showing yer accustomed clear judgment, I'm thinkin'. Fat young leddy wad ever luik twice at a coorse auld fellow like me?"

"There ye show a vera proaper sense o' yer ain defeeciencies, which I must say does ye credit, Nigel," said his sister, with somewhat unflattering approbation. "As ye say, of coorse nae young leddy wad ever think o' ye for yersel, but weemen are deep, and there's mony wad pretend they cared for ye, just to get the handling o' yer tocher."

Nigel laughed again merrily. "Trust me to defend mysel' and my tocher tae!" he said, "and when I canna I'll just send for ye to reinforce me."

And Jessie, assured that there was no immediate cause for anxiety, said within herself devoutly, "The Lord be thanked!"

CHAPTER XIII.

NORTHWARD HO!

THE summer that succeeded the great contractor's visit to Stockhampton proved one of the hottest which had been known there for many years. One week of glaring, pitiless sunshine followed another without intermission; even in comparatively cool and shady Woodbury the ladies sighed and panted behind their Venetians, and scarcely ventured out till after sunset, while down in the populous and low-lying quarters of the city the atmosphere seemed at times positively pestilential; and Agatha Hastings often felt quite sick and faint as she trod the scorched paving-stones of Crook's Peak, or went from one stifling, grimy little room to another in its overcrowded tenements. Many things had combined with the oppressive weather to render this summer an unusually trying one to her. The secretary of the Girls' Preventive Society had fallen ill, and failing another substitute, Agatha had temporarily undertaken some of her duties; then her work at the hospital was increased, for the unnatural heat was everywhere prostrating the weakly and carrying off the sick; all the beds in her ward were occupied, and there was always at least one dying woman from whose side

she could not hurry away while the thin fingers were clasping hers and the white lips entreating, "Don't go just yet, miss! Do stop and say another hymn to me—I may be taken before you come again." And in June a fresh ward had been opened adjoining her own, into which some of her patients had been moved; and as no lady visitor was as yet forthcoming for it, Miss Hastings had acceded to their earnest petition that she she would read there, too, before leaving the building. And, harder to bear and more wearying than all, she had met with some bitter disappointments in her work both among old and young; disappointments—those who live such lives as hers know them only too well—that crush and sicken the worker with the feeling that all her toil and tears have ended but in vanity and vexation of spirit.

Long before July was over Agatha had begun to look forward with almost feverish eagerness to the annual family visit to the seaside, and it unfortunately had to be deferred to a later period than usual, for Mr. Langhorne's business affairs were just then in a state that necessitated his personal supervision, and he had at once set down his foot—with a pretty wrathful stamp too—on a proposal his wife had ventured to make that the rest should precede him to their usual summer resort, leaving him to follow as soon as he should be able.

"It would be a fine thing for them, of course," he growled, "to start off and enjoy themselves while he was toiling and slaving in this stew for their sakes, but he wasn't going to be left in the house by himself to

put up with all sorts of discomfort while they were taking their pleasure at his expense—not he! A nice selfish lot they were, all of them, to think of such a thing. But he could tell them, if they couldn't wait till he could accompany them, they shouldn't go away at all, that was all."

"I daresay Agatha wouldn't mind staying to keep house for you," hazarded Mrs. Langhorne. "She never seems to care about leaving her work." While every one else had been grumbling about the heat from morning till night, Miss Hastings had borne it in silence, and was therefore not supposed to mind it.

"*Agatha!*" he cried angrily. "Really, Fanny, you talk like an idiot! I wouldn't be left alone with Agatha for a thousand pounds. I'd as soon go and stay in a nunnery as be shut up to her society."

After which Fanny, like a sensible woman, felt that there was no more to be said.

"I met Kitty Argent when I was shopping in Upper Street this afternoon," Miss Langhorne remarked at the dinner-table one sultry August evening. Kitty Argent was a young married lady, the daughter of an old friend of the family, who resided in a new district on the other side of Stockhampton.

"Did you? It's a comfort to know there's some one left in town besides ourselves!" answered her mother in an irritable tone. The heat was acting upon her temper.

"There are a few dozens of people in your district, aren't there, Aunt Agatha?" inquired Fox with an

innocent air, "and there must be a tradesman or two left in Upper Street, or Blanche couldn't have done any shopping there."

"Don't be ridiculous, Fox!" requested his mother sharply. "Well, and what had Kitty to say for herself, Blanche?"

"She's full of a scheme for taking a house in Scotland that some friends of theirs engaged for two months, and are obliged to give up at the end of a fortnight on account of the death of a relative," Blanche answered. "It's 'just a *charming* place, in the midst of the most *splendid* scenery,'—you know her way of talking,—'with the most *delicious* shooting and fishing for dear Rue'—What a shame it is to spoil a distinguished name like Rupert in that way!—only unfortunately 'dear Rue' says they spent so much money in the Engadine last year that he can't afford it unless they can get a couple of friends (or even one) to join them and share the expenses. Kitty wanted to know if one of us wouldn't go, but I told her we shouldn't at all care to bury ourselves in such an out-of-the-way place, even if we could get away just now; and then she said, Wouldn't my aunt like to go? So just to satisfy her I promised to ask you, Aunt Agatha."

"There, Aunt Agatha!" laughed Fox. "A fine opportunity for you to exercise altruism or whatever they call it."

"Pity the sorrows of a poor old colonel,
Whose empty purse won't bear him to the North."

Is your heart in the Highlands, Aunt Agatha?"

Miss Hastings did not trouble herself to reply to her nephew's banter ; a course she generally pursued, not being quick at repartee, but she silently took his suggestion into consideration. Scotland ! The visit she had paid to it with Miss North was among her brightest memories ; the very name conjured up before her a vision of wimpling burns and breezy moors and dark, wild mountains, that seemed to bring coolness and refreshing into the heat and worry of her present life. Since she had resided with the Langhorne's she had always accompanied them to whatever fashionable watering-place they chose for their summer jaunt, but it struck her now that there was no reason why she should not sometimes act independently, and here was just the opportunity for carrying out her long-cherished dream of a second sojourn in the North Countree. While she was thinking Blanche had gone on talking.

" It's not exactly in the Highlands, Kitty said, but it is in a very wild, romantic spot, miles from a railway station. The nearest neighbour is the Earl of—Dear me ! I forget his name, but it's something beginning with *Kin*, and the house is his old aunt's residence ; but at this time of the year she generally goes abroad, and it is let. He and his wife always pay attention to the people who take the house,—Crannoch Lodge it is called,—so they must be rather nice."

" For bloated aristocrats," said Fox. " By-the-bye, where does the King of Bricks and Mortar hang out when his foot is on his native heath ? Is this place anywhere within cry of His Majesty ? "

Nobody could give an answer to these inquiries, which had also occurred to Miss Hastings. When she sent Nigel Lennox the desired quotation from Ruskin, she had addressed it to Glasgow, and had received a letter of thanks dated thence—a short kind note, which she locked away in the same box with the old portfolio. Even Mr. Langhorne only knew that his relative's country-seat was somewhere beyond Glasgow.

Agatha inquired how soon the house was to be vacant.

"Next Monday," replied Blanche; "I suppose the Argents will want to take possession immediately if they make up their minds to go."

"If you would care to join them, Agatha, I see nothing to prevent you," remarked Mrs. Langhorne. "You are not bound to do whatever we do, you know." Her tone implied "And I don't care whether you are with us or not;" at which Agatha, in spite of the convenience of having the way thus made smooth for her, could not help feeling a little hurt. "Yes," Fanny went on, "I daresay you would rather enjoy it; with the Argents you could be quite free to follow your own inclinations, and climb the mountains or botanize in the woods or sit sketching the scenery at your pleasure; Kitty would ask nothing of you but to be left alone with her beloved Rue."

"I wonder he isn't sick of her spooning, and her everlasting *Rue* this and *Rue* that, by this time!" said Fox. "If I were he I should *rue* the day I ever

married such a little goose. I believe she thinks it is a special providence that she has no children—they would take up so much of her time from Rue."

"Poor Kitty! She's very childish and undeveloped, but a sweet, affectionate little thing," said his mother. "After all, heart is of more importance than brains in a wife, or indeed in any woman."

"I never realize that she is five years older than I am," said Blanche. "Only fancy! One of her grand reasons for wanting to go to Scotland is that she may admire 'Rue' in knickerbockers and those heather-coloured stockings she knitted for him last winter. 'Rue does look so splendid in a shooting-suit,' she whispered to me as we were looking in at Evans's window; 'he has such *magnificent* legs!'"

"I'm afraid no one will ever marry me for my legs," sighed Fox, whose nether limbs were decidedly thinner than was consistent with perfect symmetry. "There's another inducement for you, Aunt Agatha—when it's wet and you can't go out to sketch, you can make a study of the colonel's legs. Seriously though, do you think you'll go?"

"Perhaps I may," she answered, and as soon as dinner was over she wrote a note to Mrs. Argent stating the terms on which she would be happy to accompany them to the North, and merely asking her if they agreed to what she proposed to let her know when they were to start. About their destination she did not care to inquire particularly; there was a certain charm in the idea of making a journey into an unknown

region, and having everything burst freshly upon her; she was satisfied to know that the place was beautiful and in Scotland—a country which had somehow or other gained a new interest for her of late.

Mrs. Argent clapped her hands gleefully over Agatha's communication, and after a short consultation with "Rue," the big handsome half-pay colonel, old enough to be her father, who had been fascinated two or three years before by her doll-like prettiness and almost babyish artlessness of manner, wrote back requesting Miss Hastings to meet them at the station on the ensuing Monday evening in time to catch the eleven o'clock train for the North, adding that they wished to go straight through the next day, reaching their goal some time in the afternoon, as the colonel always liked to get a journey over as quickly as possible.

"I call that a very satisfactory arrangement," Mrs. Langhorne remarked to her daughter when all was settled. "I am glad your aunt can be of use to the Argents, for that is an intimacy I particularly want to keep up: they are really the only people we know here who are not in some way connected with trade. I never saw such a place; the very professional men are nearly all related to the Stockhampton shopkeepers." (From the well-bred (?) disdain with which Mrs. Langhorne always spoke of Woodbury society, her children had conceived an idea of the sphere in which she must have moved before her marriage, which would have considerably astonished any one who had known

plain Dr. Hastings with his homely manners and provincial accent, and his shabby old house, in which were practised far fewer of the *convenances* of modern life than in many a "Stockhampton shopkeeper's" suburban residence.) "Colonel Argent is a stupid man certainly, but you can see at once that he's a perfect gentleman. And I shall be thankful to get Agatha away, for I live in constant dread of her bringing home infection from that horrid Crook's Peak; I am sure there must be fever there, with this awful weather. How she can toil up and down to it and the Hospital in the heat as she does I can't understand; if I only cross the garden in the sun I feel quite knocked up."

"It will be rather a nice change, too, not to have her with us when we go out this year," said Blanche, who had sometimes found Aunt Agatha an inconvenient check upon the little flirtations which she reckoned among the legitimate pleasures of the seaside—"if we ever go at all, that is," added the young lady, with a mild reproduction of her mother's irritable tone.

Agatha had to work at extra high pressure during the next few days, the time given her in which to prepare for leaving home being so short; and there were so many farewell visits to pay, so many papers to arrange, so much work to be wound up or transferred for the time to other hands, that when at last she found herself standing beside the Argents in the railway station she was scarcely conscious of any sensation but one of utter lassitude and exhaustion. A close sultry evening had succeeded a day of scorch-

ing heat ; not a breath of air was stirring ; and Miss Hastings, too tired even to talk to her companions, walked to the edge of the platform and looked out into the dark-blue vista of night beyond the arch of the station roof with almost feverish longing for the train that seemed as though it would never arrive, but came snorting up at last, a black and fire-breathing demon in appearance, but in reality a friendly geni, ready to spirit her away to a land of coolness and beauty. Almost as soon as they were settled in their compartment she fell asleep from sheer weariness, and never opened her eyes till they reached Edinburgh the next morning. The Castle was looming dimly above the city through a pale-grey mist ; the air felt fresh and moist—a delicious change from the temperature they had left behind them ; her fellow-travellers were bestirring themselves and talking about breakfast. Not more than half awake, Agatha followed them to the refreshment-room, and during most of their continued northward journey she slept again, only wakened up at intervals throughout the forenoon by the sound of rain dashing against the window ; for the storm-spirit was abroad that day, and all the landscape was blotted out by thick folds of leaden-coloured vapour, much to the disgust of some cockney tourists in the same carriage, who declared that if this sort of thing were going to continue they might as well go back to London to-morrow ; they could see fogs there. But towards afternoon they left the area of the storm behind them, and passed into a region of blue skies

and white, fleecy clouds, and golden sunshine lighting up moor and brae. Miss Hastings had had enough of sleep by this time ; she roused herself and chatted to her companions, anxious to make up for her apparent taciturnity of the previous night, while her inner woman revelled in the loveliness of the scenes through which they were passing. "*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh mine help,*" she said within herself as she watched with fascinated gaze the mountain peaks rising higher and higher on each side of the line, while the valley through which it was cut grew ever narrower and deeper, and its conformation wilder and more romantic.

The afternoon was wearing away ; the sun had already disappeared behind the shoulder of the mountain, and she was wondering whether that little cluster of slate-coloured houses that looked like a child's toy-village among the giant hills could boast the privilege of a station, when the train began to slacken speed, and Colonel Argent exclaimed, "Blackden ! here we are. In another hour, Kitty, we shall be at Crannoch Lodge."

Agatha, as she stepped out upon the platform and looked around her, could hardly realize that only eighteen hours before she had been rattling in a stuffy fly through the close, smoky Stockhampton streets with their flaring gaslights. She felt like one in a new world. All around her were the everlasting hills, some gorgeous with purple and gold embroidery of gorse and heather, others wild and fantastic with jutting crags

of red or grey granite ; the fresh breezes from their summits fanned her cheek ; the babbling of burns and the cool plash of waterfalls made music in her ears, mingled with the burr of Scotch tongues, any one of which might from its accent have belonged to Nigel Lennox. Mrs. Argent declared that she was tired to death as she took her seat in the open carriage that was waiting for them, but Miss Hastings could have wished the drive twice as long. The perfect quiet of the previous day and a half had been to her just the restorative she needed ; all her lassitude had fled, and she felt able to give herself up unreservedly to the enjoyment of her new surroundings. Leaving the main road, which would, if she had only known it, have brought them straight to Glen Irvine, the carriage turned into one made through the very heart of the pine-forest, and Agatha drank in great draughts of the exhilarating mountain air, aromatic with the scent of the firs, and tasted in anticipation the exquisite delight of wandering among the thousand aisles of that great woodland cathedral, whose purple columns were ruled across with lines of amber light from the setting sun, now visible through a cleft in the hills, and of having that cone-strewn carpet of golden-green moss beneath her feet, and that closely-woven canopy of blue-green velvety foliage above her head.

The yellow bars faded from the pine-stems ; the grey twilight fell over mountain and glen, and just as Kitty was beginning to grumble that it seemed as if they were never to get there, the driver turned his

horses abruptly down a steep, narrow lane, stopping at the end of a hundred yards or so before an iron gate, through which they passed to a little grey gabled house, much shut in by the trees in its own garden. What the garden was like could hardly be seen in the gathering dusk ; " It is like Jean Ingelow's ' Cottage in a Chine,' " thought Agatha, as she gave one glance up at the surrounding woods, which she projected exploring on the morrow ; but they could hear the murmuring of the burn that ran through it, and smell the roses that embowered the little porch. This was Crannoch Lodge.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

“ Oh ! where, and oh ! where is my wee bit Daisy gone ?
Oh ! Is she in the forest wandering all alone ? ”

SO sang Nigel Lennox as he strode through the Glen Irvine woods in the golden August weather. He knew she was lingering somewhere under the shade of those old oaks and beeches, and he wanted to warn her of the approaching luncheon-hour, and thus save her a reprimand from himself for unpunctuality ; for Miss Margaret Cheyne was a dreamy little personage, sadly apt to forget the flight of time when once among the woodland bowers that were such a delightful change from the bare fields and windy moors around Murkleton. Every minute he expected to see her, standing watching one of the tiny streamlets that danced down the brae in a chain of miniature cascades to join the Irvine Burn, the sound of whose murmuring rose from the hollow far below, or looking up at the dome of translucent green leaves that threw mottled shadows on the red path and the smooth grey beech roots crawling serpent-like across it ; and he began to sing again—

“ Oh ! where, and oh ! where——”

"Here, uncle!" cried a voice that might have been a wood-nymph's, since it came from the centre of a clump of bracken, and then two of the tall green crests parted to admit a pleasant young face, followed by a trim little figure in a heather-coloured homespun frock.

"Eh! ye little taupie," cried her uncle, as she reached his side with one of her light bounds. "What do ye mean by stravaguin * aff this gate, garrin' yer auld uncle come oot to seek ye?"

"I didn't forget the time to-day, uncle," answered Daisy, clinging to his arm. "Don't you remember that lunch was to be half an hour later to suit Lady Kintail?"

"Ou ay; I'd forgotten that; and where has my wee womanie been?"

"At the Fairy Falls, uncle, with such a nice English lady! You must come with me and see her. She is staying at Crannoch Lodge, and—well, she says she isn't an artist, though she is doing the Falls beautifully; but she told me she will teach me to draw from nature, if my friends will allow me to go out with her sometimes, and I was just going to say, I knew you would be delighted, when I heard your voice and ran to meet you."

"Eh! that's kind of her; but don't ye learn drawing at Miss Rettie's?"

"We do little pictures," answered Margaret, with newly-acquired contempt for her previous attainments. "She—this lady—said she knew exactly what they

* Wandering.

were like without my telling her—castles and bridges and mill-wheels and moonlight scenes with the lights in Chinese white ; but we never learn any of the rules of Art. She is going to teach me all about Form and Colour and Light and Shade ; she says it will be rather dry at first, but I shan't mind that. Look, there she is, uncle ! You can see her through the trees Isn't she pretty ? ”

Mr. Lennox did not answer ; the one glimpse he had caught through the interlacing boughs had sufficed to make him drop Daisy's hand and stride hastily on, and in a couple of seconds he had turned the corner of the path, and come into full view of his niece's new friend. No—he was not mistaken ; there, framed in greenery, as though she were part and parcel of the woodland, with ferns and Scotch blue-bells in her large straw hat, and her dark-blue cambric dress set off at the throat by a bunch of the delicate pink cross-leaved heath, stood Agatha Hastings. She advanced to meet him with a smile of mingled surprise and pleasure—and five minutes later they were all walking back to the Castle together, Nigel having insisted on her returning with them to lunch.

Perhaps what followed may best be told by giving an extract from Agatha's diary. She had kept one now for a good many years ; sometimes it was merely a bare recitation of facts ; at others, when anything had occurred to interest her strongly, she would sit up at night writing page after page of her experiences and impressions. A good many leaves had been taken up

with the great contractor's visit to Stockhampton, quite as many, indeed, as had sufficed for the record of the three months that had since elapsed, and now it seemed likely to grow voluminous again with her description of his northern home.

AGATHA'S DIARY.

. I had no idea that Glen Irvine Castle was such a lordly mansion; I do not wonder that its master is so frankly and confessedly proud of it, and of his mother, whom he took me to see before lunch, and in whom I was very agreeably disappointed. I had expected to find a rather superior specimen of a Scotch "auld-wife"; I saw a really beautiful and noble-looking old lady, who welcomed me with dignified friendliness and in much better English than her son speaks as a rule. She must have been a grandly-proportioned woman once, in the days when she carried that sturdy laddie over the braes on her back (How strange it seems when one thinks of the big bush-bearded chieftain he has developed into!); and now she might pass for a Dowager Duchess as she sits up in her high-backed arm-chair robed in rich black satin, with a delicate lace cap resting on the abundant bands and waves of her silvery hair.

* * * * *

I should think that no one with a less powerful individuality than Nigel Lennox could have so thoroughly succeeded in fusing into one harmonious

whole the heterogeneous elements gathered round the long table in the fine old dining-room. All classes of society seemed to be represented there, and some classes not in society at all. There was the Countess of Kintail (decidedly the plainest dressed and most ordinary looking woman in the room); there was the Dean of St. Bede's, Dr. Tempest, with his pleasant-faced wife and three handsome daughters; there was an old Professor from Aberdeen, who discussed rival theogonies with Mr. Micklejohn throughout the entire meal; there were several members of the Mortis family, of various ages (rather pushing, pretentious people, I fancy); there was my prospective pupil, and her brother Malcolm, a shy young undergraduate, who rewarded the attempts at conversation of a sociably-disposed young lady who sat next him with a succession of monosyllables; and there was (to leave out several whom I did not make a special "note of") a homely little Mr. Buyers from Glasgow, an old servant of the firm as I afterwards learnt, who had only arrived the day before, and seemed to have hardly shaken down into his evidently unaccustomed surroundings.

But if it was the most mixed, it was certainly the merriest party I ever joined; there was not a particle of stiffness or formality; every one was laughing and talking and evidently on the best of terms with himself and all his neighbours—the whole assembly, in fact, seeming to be infected by the buoyant spirits of our host, who looked the very personification of hospitality as he beamed upon his guests from the head of the

table, seeing their wants in a moment, and allowing none to feel neglected.

I was placed next to Lady Kintail. She is a bright little woman, I should think about thirty, with a great knack of making herself agreeable. "I hear you are an authoress, Miss Hastings," she began to me. "It will be quite a feather in my cap to have you at Crannoch; all the distinguished people gravitate towards Glen Irvine as a rule." When people pay me such extravagant compliments they make me feel so foolish that I have not the least idea what to say, and probably leave them with the impression that I am calmly appropriating what in fact seems too absurd to need repudiation. Her ladyship went on to observe that she was charmed to have met me at the Castle—she had been intending to call at the Lodge to-morrow; and Lord Kintail had been saying that he was sure his uncle, Major Mauchlin, had known Colonel Argent in India. But I think I will put down all that I can remember of the conversation at the table, dialogue fashion (only excepting my own share in it); it will amuse me to look over it some day when I am feeling dull.

Lady Kintail (to Mr. Lennox). I want to tell you of a good work I am just beginning; a Sunday School at Crannoch, conducted on principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Mr. Lennox. Well done! Where does your school meet?

Lady K. On our lawn when it is fine, and in the

schoolroom when it is wet. Isobel and Grizel are the nucleus, and I mean Baby to come in as soon as he can talk. Then I have all the juveniles among the servants, indoor and outdoor, and some of the tenants' children who think the walk too long to Glen Irvine School; and Mrs. Forsyth has promised me her three, though I am afraid she thinks me a very raw hand, and will probably supplement my instructions with some more edifying ones of her own after they go home. Can Daisy come? I may be glad of her help in the teaching. She tells me she has sometimes taken an infant-class at Murkleton.

Mr. L. Daisy shall come, but if you want any help or advice I recommend you to apply to Miss Hastings there. She's grand at young folks. How are all your lassies and lads getting on, Miss Hastings, and your Hospital patients?

Mrs. Tempest. Don't remind her of them, Mr. Lennox, if you want her to enjoy her holiday. I know when we had a large town parish I used to long to forget the very names of the poor streets in it while we were away in the summer.

Miss Tempest. Mother, how can you talk so? I am sure your devotion to the work at St. Peter's was in every one's mouth!

The Dean. That just explains what your mother says, my dear. It is the work we throw our whole heart and soul into, as she did, that uses up our energies and makes a thorough change of scene imperative at least once a year. The task you plod

through in a dull perfunctory way will never tire you out except from *ennui*. (How true that is! I have often thought that some of our doings are like Aurora Leigh's early poems—you may rip them up and find no blood upon the rapier's point; while others—well, God only knows what they cost us.) You may depend upon it, Moses found his controversy for and with his own people far more exhausting than they did their brickmaking without straw.

Lady K. Talking of Moses, what an excellent sermon Mr. Forsyth gave us on Sunday about the Tabernacle! Even my old seceding housekeeper, who consented to come in when the prayers were over, declared that she agreed with everything he said. Higher praise than that she never accords to any preacher outside her own body. But don't you think (*to Mr. Lennox*) we might hint to the dear man that as he is here on purpose to rest, it will be quite excusable for him to curtail his discourses to half their usual length?

Mr. L. Eh! did you think he was too long.

Lady K. That means you did not. I stand rebuked. But I fear some of the English people who come for the shooting will scarcely be of your opinion. I suppose the dock-labourers and other unwashed persons who form his congregation in the East End of London like to have their divinity, as well as their beer, in liberal measure. (I wonder how much her ladyship knew of what she was talking about. This Mr. Forsyth must be an exceptionally successful clergy-

man if he is able to fill his church with dock-labourers, or, for that matter, labourers of any sort, washed or unwashed.)

The Dean. Is that the man you were so delighted at getting hold of for your new church, Lennox?

Mr. L. Ay, ay. That's him. I was gangin' about, as Jock Miklejohn said, like Diogenes wi' his lantern, seeking, not for an honest man but for an earnest minister, and I found him at last in the chaplain of a county goal.

Miss Mortis. Some people have curious ideas of happiness. I heard Mrs. Forsyth say yesterday that it had been her husband's ambition for years to have a living in the East End of London; and the children were telling me, as one of the privileges connected with their old home, that they used to be in and out of the prison every day—to visit the Governor's wife, as it turned out, but it had an odd sound.

Mrs. T. You always manage to get the right person for the right place, Mr. Lennox.

Lady K. Yes, does he not? He never by any chance puts a round man into a square hole. Mr. Forsyth and his wife seem just the people for their present sphere. There is something quite apostolic about their earnestness and simplicity.

Miss M. They seem to have been decidedly apostolic in the choice of their children's names—Tryphosa and Eunice and Silas.

Miss Tempest. Yes; Mr. Forsyth told me they called their little boy Silas in memory of the first religious

service ever held in a prison. Tryphosa had a twin sister called Tryphena, who died when she was a baby.

Mr. Geoffry Mortis. Tryphosa! Is *that* the name of the tall girl they call Trip? I thought perhaps it stood for Triptych, only her father doesn't appear to have any mediæval proclivities.

Miss M. Yes, the one who was flirting so with you at the picnic yesterday.

Mr. G. M. With me! With Cheyne, you mean. Didn't you see how sweet he was on her? Eh, Cheyne?

Malcolm Cheyne (gruffly). Aw'm sure I was nothing of the kind, and that ye know, Mortis.

Mr. L. Eh! Mac makin' up to the young leddies? What's this I hear of you, callant?

Mac (growing quite red). It's false, uncle. They might as well say it of Mr. Micklejohn there.

Mr. L. (evidently tickled at this idea). Ha! ha! ha! Jock! (loudly to his secretary, who was deep in an absorbing argument with the Professor). Do ye hear what they're sayin' of ye?

Mr. Micklejohn (calmly continuing the observation he had been making)—By the cross-fertilization of the deanthropomorphized divinity of Maimonides with Ben Gerson's theory of the eternity of matter——

Mr. L. (still more loudly, amid the amused silence of the whole table). Micklejohn! Leave your Ben Gerson, whaever he was, and just answer me this: Is it true that ye were flirting wi' Miss Forsyth yesterday?

Mr. Micklejohn (with supreme contempt). What's the good of asking me that?—As I was saying, Pro-

fessor Drysdale, through these predisposing causes combined ye get the afore-mentioned effect upon the mind of Spinoza.

Mr. L. What's the gude of asking you anything, indeed? . . . Miss Hastings, I hope you're taking care of yourself. The waters of oblivion that Mrs. Tempest was recommending to ye are a useful prescription at a time, but I doubt ye'll not grow fat upon them. Try some of that cake before ye—it's a kind that my housekeeper's famous for.

Lady K. Yes, Miss Hastings, you really must taste Mrs. Elworthy's celebrated cake, the recipe for which nothing will induce her to divulge, though she has been implored for it on all hands. She considers it a monopoly of Glen Irvine Castle, and I don't believe wild horses could tear it from her.

Mr. L. Hoot awa! She's no sae ridic'lus as that. I have but to bid her give it up to your ladyship and she'll do so this very day.

Lady K. Indeed, I would not think of asking you to be so cruel, and ungrateful too, when you know what a pleasure it is to the dear creature to feel that her master can get something that nobody else can.

Mr. L. (laughing). You will have your joke, Lady Kintail. Buyers! What are ye about doon there, mon? I don't believe ye're making half a meal.

Mr. Buyers (who looks as if he knew what dyspepsia was). Thank you, Mr. Lennox, I'm doing vera well indeed, sir.

Mr. G. Mortis (evidently meaning mischief—I fancy

he is a young gentleman somewhat after my nephew Fox's type). I'll attend to him, Mr. Lennox. Here, Mr. Buyers (cutting an enormous segment from a rich-looking pie before him), allow me to help you to some of this tart.

Mr. Buyers (deprecatingly, looking quite alarmed at the Benjamin's mess thus thrust upon him). Indeed, Mr. Geoffry, sir, I don't think I could——

Mr. G. Mortis (in a would-be confidential whisper). But you must really, Mr. Buyers! I assure you Mr. Lennox will be seriously offended if you don't.

Mr. B. (in desperation). You are most kind, Mr. Geoffry, but I hope you and Mr. Lennox will excuse me, sir, for if I was to touch the least bittie of that it would clean upset my stamack.

MacCheyne (generously coming to the rescue, while his little sister looked as if she did not know whether to titter with Miss Mortis or to appear unconscious with the better-bred Miss Tempests). It's a shame, Mortis! You'll please my uncle best, Mr. Buyers, by pleasing yourself as to what you take and what you leave. He always says his house is Liberty Hall.

Poor Mr. Buyers looked unutterably relieved. A minute before I think he could have echoed the English merchant's protest to his Highland host—"Sir, your hospitality amounts to brutality!"—but now he leant back in his chair with an expression of thankfulness that appeared to afford as much entertainment to his tormentor as his previous embarrassment had done.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPANISH ROOM.

(AGATHA'S DIARY CONTINUED.)

AFTER lunch Mr. Lennox took me all over the Castle. . . . In one room, the last we visited nothing has been altered for over three hundred years ; the Spanish leather hangings on the walls, embossed in chocolate and gold (whence the apartment has got the name of the Spanish Room) ; the massive richly-carved oaken furniture, black with age ; the huge open fireplace,—all are just as they were in the days when the Lady of Glen Irvine climbed the winding stair to the battlements of the old East Tower to watch for her husband's return from the Battle of Flodden, only its present owner has hung up his favourite picture opposite the chimney-place, and has substituted a large oriel with a broad inviting seat for the small window high up in the wall, which sufficed for the days when personal safety was held of more account than abundant light or expansive prospects. This was formerly the lady's withdrawing room ; so said Daisy Cheyne, who accompanied us ; it is now her uncle's private sanctum. I can guess why he chose it ; the view from the oriel

affords a distant glimpse of the little loch on whose shores he was born. He pointed it out to me, shimmering in the sunshine like a mirror of burnished gold, at the far end of a long narrow ravine which opens out into Glen Irvine just opposite the western side of the Castle. It is called the Birken Glen, a name the origin of which is evident from the cloud of soft ethereal green that veils its steep sides; some day I must explore its beauties.

Mr. Lennox set me to translate an inscription carved upon a slab of wood let into the wall above the high old chimney-piece—itself a treasure of wood-carving that would make a connoisseur's mouth water—thus:

“IN THE LORD'S AIN HOWFF
AT THE LANG LAST
SALL I MAK
BYDAND;”

but I had to “give it up,” whereupon Daisy, who had been watching me with a knowing expression all the time, did me to wit that it was the last verse of the twenty-third Psalm.

“And in God's House for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be”—

she quoted, from the Scotch metrical arrangement, which I believe is more familiar to Scotch children than the Authorized Version itself. I asked if the inscription were as old as the room.

“Only the last word of it,” said my host; “*bydand*,

abiding. That was the motto of the family who lived here before—they were Gordons ; but I didna consider that I had any right to it—that sort o' gear is not to be bought along wi' a house, like a tavern sign, and I didna care much for it either, but just about that time I came across yon words in an auld version, and I thought, 'That will make me a braw motto—I've as guid a right to it forbye as any other Christian—and I've got the last word down ready to hand,' so I just had the others inscribed above it."

"That was a 'happy thought' in the best sense of the expression," I said. To me there was something exceedingly touching in the choice of such a motto by a man like Nigel Lennox. According to commonly received ideas it would seem far more appropriate to some homeless waif or worn-out sufferer in a hospital (and yet I have known such to look upon the Lord's House as only a last resource when earthly comforts, poor though they might be, were no longer available) than to one who wants for no gratification that money can buy, and whose cup seems brimming over with all that is supposed to make "life worth living." Yet so it is sometimes, and in our day I think more than ever ; the conditions of the parable are reversed ; it is Dives who pants after Abraham's bosom, while Lazarus clings to his rags and is loath to exchange the dogs and the doorstep for even the society of the celestials.

Lady Kintail kindly drove me back to Crannoch in her pony-carriage, and gave me a good deal of information by the way. She spoke very warmly of Nigel

Lennox ; she says her husband quite looks upon him as a father (he may well do so !), and takes his advice about everything. As for the Castle, she declares it only wants a mistress to be perfection ; there I differ from her ladyship—at any rate the want is not apparent when its master is at home ; but she has given up hoping that he will ever marry again. His wife, she told me, has been dead for twenty years. She was a blacksmith's daughter, a pretty but rather commonplace girl whom he had known from childhood and got engaged to when quite a lad ; there were troubles of some kind in her family, on account of which the wedding had to be delayed again and again, but Nigel kept true to her through long years of separation, and hastened to claim her as soon as he learnt that she was free, though by that time he had risen to a position from which he might well have looked much higher for a wife. "It was quite a romance," said the Countess, "but like most romances outside the covers of a novel, it did not exactly end in 'sheer supreme substantial bliss.' He was very fond of her, and her death was a great grief to him,—she fell into a decline after the loss of her baby-girl, the only child they ever had, and died on the fifth anniversary of their marriage,—but there was no community of interest between them ; or rather his aspirations had outgrown hers, so I have heard from those who knew him then. She was gentle and amiable enough, but small-minded—she never rose beyond the level of shallow insipidity, whereas with Nigel, as my aunt, Lady Jean, sometimes

says, it has been *Excelsior* all along. Ah! here comes the wonderful Mrs. Elworthy," as a plump lady in black entered the road from a plantation just in front of us. Lady Kintail reined up the ponies and accosted the housekeeper in her usual frank, chatty style, rallying her on the way she spoilt her master—it appeared she was now on her way to a distant farm-house to purchase some eggs of a particular breed, for which he has a special fancy. She is a comely middle-aged woman with a high colour and a quantity of wavy light-brown hair, and what seemed to me an overdone, affected manner, as she replied to my companion's good-natured banter by declaring in measured tones that nothing afforded her so much pleasure as to find out and gratify any little wish of her dear master's. "As for trouble," she concluded, throwing up her hands, "the more trouble I take for him the happier I am! He thinks there are no eggs like Mrs. MacFie's, so I take care that he shall never be without one for his breakfast." The Countess, evidently desirous of drawing her out, asked why she could not send one of the servants. "My lady," said Mrs. Elworthy sententially, "there is one maxim I have always followed, and I have never found it to fail me. *If you want a thing done, do it yourself.* Servants don't always bring what you send them for. *Not* that I wish to complain of our domestics; on the whole, they give me great satisfaction; but then, as I often tell them, if they were to fail in their duty to such a master as Mr. Lennox they would be simply *less* than human; less than

human!" she repeated with another wave of her hands. I wronged Mrs. Elworthy, however, by setting her down as a gushing, unreal sort of person; from what Lady Kintail told me afterwards she must be a thoroughly good and noble woman, and has gone through heavy trials, though one would not think it from her blooming exterior. She first made her present master's acquaintance by going to him to plead for her husband, who was a builder in a small way near London, and having got into difficulties through gambling, had attempted a gross fraud in connection with a sub-contract he undertook for Lennox & Mortis. "She went down on her knees to our friend Nigel," said her ladyship, "and so moved his kind heart with her entreaties that he consented to defer prosecuting for a day or two, so as to give the wretched man time to get off to America, where he died soon after, professedly penitent. The poor wife insisted on giving up all her own little property to make good his fraud, though it left her penniless, and Mr. Lennox was altogether so well-pleased with her conduct that he exerted himself to get some employment for her, and eventually engaged her as his housekeeper, a position she has filled to perfection, and her devotion to her master, as she takes a pride in calling him,—though she is in fact better connected than many of the people who sit as guests at his table,—is something wonderful. There is no one in all the world like 'dear Mr. Lennox' in her eyes; and it strikes me," Lady Kintail concluded, "that it says a great deal for Nigel Lennox's

real goodness of heart that the two persons who know him most intimately behind the scenes—Mr. Micklejohn and Mrs. Elworthy—are the two who of all others worship the very ground he treads on.”

* * * * *

I shall enjoy giving Daisy some drawing-lessons. I am not great at execution, but I know enough to ground her in the first principles of Art, of which she is at present woefully ignorant. Her uncle seemed very pleased at the idea.

I have arranged to meet her in the wood to-morrow morning, weather permitting, and Mr. Lennox wants me to come to lunch at the Castle afterwards, and join an excursion to the Irvine Lynn, which is one of the lions of the neighbourhood, that he and some of his visitors are to make in the afternoon. In the meantime I have told my pupil to draw me some outlines of trees,—oak, ash, and beech,—first from memory, as well as she can, and then from nature also a leaf of each, that I may find out whether she has any idea of their respective shapes. I rather suspect, from her look of dismay at the first part of the task I set her, that all tree-forms are pretty much alike in her eyes at present.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. LENNOX.

(AGATHA'S DIARY—A WEEK LATER.)

“**W**ITH God,” I have read in a sermon, “ask much and expect more.” Well, I hoped, if I did not exactly pray for a certain amount of enjoyment in this visit to the North Countree, but little indeed did I dream of all this pleasant intercourse with Glen Irvine Castle, or of such a congenial companion for the hours I spend sketching out of doors as I find in my woodland fairy, “Uncle Nigel’s wee Daisy-chain.” How curious it seems now that the sweet-looking little lassie, who began my acquaintance as I sat under the beech-tree that first day by offering to fetch fresh water for my painting, and then stood watching me with such intelligent interest,—I wondering all the while whether she could be the laird’s daughter, the minister’s, or the gamekeeper’s,—should have turned out to be *his* niece, the child of that “wee Jessie,” of whom I have heard him speak so affectionately. She is a pupil after my own heart, with her keen perception of the beautiful and her intense eagerness for instruction, and sometimes reminds me of my early self, *minus* angles and oddities and *plus* a sweet childlike simplicity

which was never, I fear, one of little Agatha Hastings' characteristics.

To-day we were interrupted in our work by a sudden downpour of rain, which sent us flying back to the Castle at full speed ; happily we had not gone very far afield. I could not find it in my heart to regret the *spate* (I am growing quite familiar with all the native expressions) ; it was so grand to watch the storm gather in the west, darken the golden mirror of Loch Vour, and sweep up through the Birken Glen to Glen Irvine, where it spent itself in fierce assault against the Castle windows, and then pass on to the eastward, overshadowing one half of the sky with a veil of dark cloud,—inky in hue, yet saturated with a lurid glow,—while the other half was sunbright and blue as an ideal June morning ; and then it afforded me the opportunity of paying a long visit to old Mrs. Lennox. She gave me a warm welcome, and we had a pleasant *crack* together in her pretty sitting-room, which is full of tokens of Nigel's thoughtful love. She is really a delightful old lady, full of shrewdness and originality,—not the originality of an unlettered woman either, for she is exceedingly well-read,—and the occasional Scotticisms she lets fall add piquancy and flavour to her conversation. She showed me her “daily rations,” as she calls the supply of books which she keeps on a little revolving book-stand at her side, ranged after a certain order of merit ; magazines and light literature on the lowest shelf, history and science on the next one ; then came religious works new and old—Ruther-

ford and Bishop Hall rubbing shoulders with some of our latest exegetical writers, and at the top of all her Bible and Prayer Book. The sight of the latter led me to suppose at first that she was an Episcopalian, as they call Church people in Scotland, but I find she is a staunch Presbyterian, though not at all a bigoted one ; indeed, I fancy her attachment to the Scottish Kirk is more a matter of patriotism than, as with many of her countrywomen, an integral part of her personal religion. She is an earnest student of our Liturgy, and has an intense admiration for some of its prayers. "There's bits in them just wonderful for force and fervour," she said. "That one in the Communion Service now,—'*Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit.*' Well, I don't know how you English folks feel that have been accustomed to it every week of your lives, but to me it always brings the thought of a rushing mighty wind, like that the Apostles felt at Pentecost, coming in and sweeping away all that's foul and evil. And where will you match the *Prayer of St. Chrysostom*? A golden prayer indeed! '*Granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.*' Why, there you have all you want for this world and the next in a nutshell."

I have often thought, for my own part, that some of these prayers are like the magical tent in the "Arabian Nights," which could be held in a child's hand or expanded into a tabernacle for an army, and I said as much to Mrs. Lennox.

"Ay, you are right, my dear," she answered ; "that

just fits them. Isn't it Ruskin who says that old prayers, however quaint and erring, are always ten times more condensed and comprehensive than modern ones? I love my own Kirk, and, please God, I'll never change it for another, but all the same I think you English Church people have a noble heirloom in your Book of Common Prayer."

My old friend is almost enthusiastic in her appreciation of the great facts of Science and Natural History, and is well abreast of the latest discoveries of our modern *savans*; on the other hand, she cares very little for fiction, and only dips into it now and then, as a change from her more solid studies. She was good enough to say, however, that she had really enjoyed a story of mine that she got for Daisy a little while ago, which I thought, after what had gone before, a very high compliment. Neither has she much taste for poetry, though she likes listening to an old ballad, or a good stirring epic now and then; and modern "sacred poetry" she thinks for the most part "mawkish stuff," while "as for the silly bits of jingling rhymes some gude folks miscall hymns and judge fit to be sung in public worship nowadays, I've just a *scunner* at them!" she declared (an expressive word, that, to denote strong aversion!), and she nodded her head emphatically when I quoted to her from "Jonas Fisher"—

"Such funny little baby words

To make Heaven's awful mysteries plain!

We ought to be of childlike heart,

But surely not of childish brain."

"That's just what I say, my dear. Surely we ought to praise the Almighty in the noblest form of words we're capable of intelligently using." (In theory I agree with the dear old lady, but in practice I find that these same despised compositions have a distinct value. I doubt if my young friends in Crook's Peak are "capable of intelligently using" any of a higher order—certainly they would not do so with half so much zest as they throw into a lively "sacred song" with a "jiggy" chorus, while in the Hospital such are constantly begged for and received with sighs of appreciation echoed from bed to bed, while for one of our really grand, sublime old hymns I only get a mild "Thank you, miss," from one or two.) "But we don't all feel alike," she went on. "Nigel, now, if he came upon a party of people bawling away at that kind of stuff would be off to join in directly. 'Eh, what does it matter, mother?' he always says. 'They're good Christian folks, and I love them!'" (Just what I should have expected of him, and I like him none the worse for it, though my judgment leads me to share his mother's view.) "That's what Nigel says, but I can't see with him—to be sure, I'm not so devout as he is by a long way," she added candidly, as though that might perhaps explain it.

On the subject of Nigel Mrs. Lennox grew diffusive ; if he were her own son she could not be more bound up in him than she evidently is. She spoke to me of his childhood and her own early married life, and of the almost tragical death of her husband, the effect of

a kick from a vicious horse, which he only survived a few hours. "It's more than fifty years syne," she said, "but it seems as though it were only yesterday, I stood at the door in the gloaming wi' my wee Jessie in my arms and watched them carrying him home to die. I could neither greet nor speak; I could but hang over him and hold his hand, and he pressed mine and he said, 'Janet woman, I have but ae legacy to leave ye, and that's the lad Nigel. Be a mother to wee Nigel, Janet, for my sake.' Not that I had been unkind to the bairn or neglectful of him, only I hadna given him the motherly love he needed, poor bit mannie! But from that day forth Nigel was to me as the very apple of my eye. Eh! the plans I laid for his future, and hoo I saved and pinched that I might lay by for sending him to college; for an old man who was counted wiser than his neighbours had said the laddie had by-ordinar' capabilities, and would mak' his mark in the world; and how would that be, thought I, but in the way of book-learning? And I said to myself that my Angus's name would perhaps go down to posterity as the father of the famous scholar Nigel Lennox. It was a sore trial to me to see him set himself dead against all my wishes; and when he was off to Glasgow—though I'd bidden him to go myself in a temper—I thought my heart would just break. I partly blame myself for it now; I was over hard on him, making him study with me in the evenings after he came home from school, when I might have seen that his talents lay in quite another direction. Ay, he told you about it, did he, and how Jock

Micklejohn followed him? Poor Jock! He's an odd creature, isn't he, Miss Hastings? It's strange how folks' spiritual positions alter as time goes on; it was Nigel that looked up to Jock then, but now it's the latter that looks up to the former—'the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.' Not but what Jock's a God-fearing man, only he doesn't let his light shine as Nigel does."

I told her it was hardly fair to measure other people by Mr. Lennox, and then wished I had not—I do so hate to be guilty of anything that sounds like flattery, even though it be only the truth; but Mrs. Lennox received it as merely an allusion to an obvious fact. "That's true, my dear," she said, "and, indeed, what am I, to be passing judgment on others? I've need to look to myself! But I was going to say, even though Jock was with the lad, I often trembled for him away in that big wicked toon with all its temptations, and many a quiet Sabbath afternoon I've gone up to his little room, that I always kept ready for him in case he should come home suddenly, like the prodigal son, and knelt down by his bed and prayed, 'Lord, take care of my Nigel! O God, don't let him go altogether astray.' I knew little enough of true religion at that time, but if ever a woman wrestled in prayer with God I did when I besought him for my Angus's boy. And He was better to me than my fears or my prayers," and a smile of joyful pride lit up the handsome old face. "I have just one more wish for him; I doubt I'll not see it granted, but the Lord's

will be done. He does all things well ; I sowed in tears and He made me to reap in joy."

What this ungratified wish was Mrs. Lennox did not say, and of course it was not my place to ask, though I felt a little curious. She went on to speak of Daisy and to thank me for "the trouble I take with her," just as if the pleasure were not quite as much on one side as on the other, perhaps rather more so. Do the young ever care for their elders as they are cared for by them? But that's the way of the world ; one gets overwhelmed with gratitude for favours that cost nothing, while the *real* sacrifices one makes for others generally pass unnoticed.

"I've often thought the lassie would be the better of having some one to take her in charge a bit while she's here," said her grandmother. "I doubt she's a wee bit in the way whiles among all the grown-up folks downstairs, though she's not exactly a young bairn ; and Nigel will always have her at this time. He has the other Cheynes by turns ; Angus comes now when Mac goes, and after that Robina's coming, but Daisy must stay all the two months of her holidays. What would you think, Miss Hastings? Nigel would hardly believe the bairn when she told him you had been racing with her down the Moss Brae yesterday. He said he couldna imagine *you* runnin' and tearin' aboot—sic a want of penetration as there is in men ! 'Buff and nonsense, Nigel !' I told him ; 'Miss Hastings is ower sensible no' to hauld with the Apostle that bodily exercise is profitable for a little, whiles.'"

"Yes, I remember," I said. "We had been discussing rather a deep subject; Daisy's intelligence often tempts me to take her beyond her depth in a way that my conscience rebukes me for afterwards, and I said to her that a good scamper would drive the cobwebs out of our brains."

"So she told her uncle; she was quite in distress, poor lassie! fancying he was finding a fault in you, but he only laughed at her and said she didna need to justify you to him. I don't think you need be afraid of overtaxing her mind, Miss Hastings; I believe in letting young folks follow their natural bent—in reason, of course. I know what a mistake I made in that respect wi' Nigel lang syne. It won't hurt her to be a bluestocking with you one minute if you can be a bairn with her the next. Silly word that, *bluestocking*; I'm glad it's going out of fashion. The sooner ill fashions go out, whether old or new, the better, I say." That speech was just characteristic of Mrs. Lennox; she is a delightful contrast to those good old ladies who bewail the dying out of everything that obtained "when I was a girl," and shake their heads and sigh over every modern innovation, with the remark that "such things were never thought of in *my* time."

But what a glass-house this world is! One cannot commit the simplest action without having it discussed and bandied about by one's friends. I hope my deeds may never find harsher critics than Nigel Lennox and his mother.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STORY OF BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS.

(AGATHA'S DIARY CONTINUED.)

MRS. FORSYTH was lunching at the Castle to-day, and we walked back to Crannoch together. That is another pleasure that has sprung out of my visit here, making the acquaintance of the Rev. Charles Simeon Forsyth and his wife Grace, who are exactly what Lady Kintail described them—apostolically earnest single-minded Christians. We have become quite intimate already, they and I, though our friendship—yes, I think I may call it that—is only a few days old. The farmhouse where they are sojourning—it is called by the highly-appropriate name of *Windy Nook*—is perched on a spur of the hill just above Crannoch Lodge, and we are constantly meeting, which is very pleasant, for they are just the sort of folks with whom I feel most at home. Intercourse with people of culture and intellect is extremely delightful; no one enjoys it more than I do, but it is to such as this good woman and her husband, to whom the service of God and of their fellows is as the very air they breathe, that my heart warms. They may not be brilliant, nor even original,

but, as Nigel Lennox says, "What does it matter? They are good Christian folks, and I love them!"

There are some of this type among my co-workers at Stockhampton, but there we are all so busy that we never seem to have time to get at one another's inner selves; or perhaps they do not think me worth cultivating. I know I sometimes feel a little like the Red Indian who addressed a missionary meeting in Woodbury last winter (through his interpreter), and who ended his speech by saying pathetically, "I often feel lonely in your country, for I do not know your language; here I can understand no one and no one can understand me. But" (good comfort for lonely folks everywhere and of all colours!) "when I get to heaven I shall understand every one and every one will understand me."

But I cry shame on myself for uttering the faintest cheep of a complaint in this happy valley where every one is so friendly. If my heavenly Father offers me a full cup of enjoyment, shall I not "take this and be thankful"?

Much as I love and honour dear Mrs. Forsyth, there is one fault I have to find with her and some others of her stamp. Why will they persist in setting themselves, in the matter of dress, in such utter opposition to all that is tasteful or becoming? I can see reason in choosing a particular style of attire and keeping to it, and I have scant respect to the fashions myself, but where is the sense or religion of always being a certain number of years behind them? The unworldliness, or

rather *other-worldliness*, of this good clergyman's wife is beautiful, but surely not incompatible with a little outward attractiveness, which she might easily manage without infringing on the strict economy she is no doubt obliged to practise. As it is, one would think she tried to make herself look as ungainly as possible, and but for the goodness which beams from her by no means plain face, I should feel disposed to describe her as a perfect fright.

Mr. Lennox must feel well repaid for the trouble he took to arrange for their visit to the North by the gratification with which she is continually overflowing. Certainly Mrs. Forsyth is enjoying herself here most thoroughly. "This splendid air!" she kept exclaiming this afternoon, whenever the wind blew in our faces. She declares her children have grown quite fat and rosy upon it already. "And our lodgings are in such a delightful breezy situation—we are nearly blown away as soon as we step outside the door; indeed, I never allow my little boy to go beyond the gate by himself, for fear of the wind catching him and carrying him over the rocks. Our parlour is rather small when we are all in it, to be sure, but that matters little when we have such a magnificent drawing-room to sit in as the moor at the back of the house—that is what my Eunice calls it, 'our drawing-room.' 'It's just like one, mother,' she said the other day; 'the heather is the carpet,' and I'm sure it's as clean and dry as one, 'and the blae-berry bushes are the sofas and armchairs with spring-cushions and green coverings. And it isn't every one

that has a drawing-room that stretches for miles, and where you can eat the fruit off the sofas, and pick the flowers on the carpet.'” (Certainly the Forsyths take good use out of their “drawing-room.” Strolling up in the direction of Windy Nook yesterday, I came upon the whole family literally rolling among Eunice’s green cushions. Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth reclining luxuriously in the hollows between the billowy blaeberry bushes, and the children, including tall young ladyish Trip,—rather *too* young ladyish for fifteen, but a nice girl on the whole,—sprawling about in highly-unconventional positions, picking blaeberries with blackened fingers and ferociously stained lips. As for Silas, nothing but the top of his straw hat was visible as he crept about on all-fours among the low bushes like a happy little lamb at graze, uttering inarticulate bleats of pleasure every now and then as his chubby fingers fished out the lovely bloomy berries from their hiding-places, and conveyed them to his rosy, or rather purple, mouth.)

“And our landlady is *so* nice!” continued Mrs. Forsyth, “so different from the grasping woman we were with last year at Ramsgate. Only fancy! she sends us up scones and oatcakes for tea nearly every night, and never charges a penny for them in the bill, and I am sure the children have had twice as much milk as we have been asked to pay for; and as for appropriating any scraps we send down, she never dreams of such a thing. I wonder if all Scotch landladies are like her, Miss Hastings, or whether the people about here have learnt to be so kind from Mr.

Lennox.—Dear Mr. Lennox! How good and thoughtful it was of him to mention Mr. Forsyth when Lord Kintail was inquiring for some one to officiate here just now; it has been such a boon to us all! But it is only of a piece with his kindness to us throughout. Did you ever hear how we first met him, Miss Hastings?—No? Oh, then I must tell you about it—it is just like something you would read in a tale.

“Five years ago we did not know him even by name. The first time we ever heard of him was when we read one day in the *Garscombe Journal* that Messrs. Lennox & Mortis, the great builders, had undertaken the contract for the new County Lunatic Asylum near Southminster, which is only a few miles from us; and later we heard that one of the partners had come down to inspect the works, and see to the men’s quarters; but of course without feeling much interest in the matter. Well, one stormy evening that winter, or rather spring, for it was the beginning of March, Simeon had to go to a little hamlet between Garscombe and Southminster to take a cottage meeting for a clerical friend who had been suddenly called away. I wanted him to give up going—a very unusual thing for me to do, Miss Hastings, but he had a cold, and it was such wretched weather,—a bitter east wind, and snow and rain falling every now and then,—that I told him it was not really worth his while to walk nearly three miles through exposed slushy lanes just to meet the two or three who would come out on such a night; but of course he would not listen to me!” And Mrs.

Forsyth's face kindled with a glow of pride that proved her worthy to be a hero's wife—as she is, in my opinion. “You might as well try to keep the tide from coming in as to keep my husband from fulfilling any duty he had once undertaken! ‘Two or three!’ he answered me. ‘If but one soul comes to be fed, that one must not be sent hungry away;’ so after that there was nothing for me to do but to tie his comforter round his neck and pray that he might take no harm. I could not help feeling anxious, though, whenever the wind howled outside and the sleet dashed against the windows; and he was later in returning than I had expected him to be. He came home at last, all wet and sprinkled with snow, and with such a glad face that I knew in a minute something had happened to encourage him. And then he told me that when he commenced the meeting he felt rather dispirited, for there were only one or two women and a few fidgety children present, but during the opening prayers some more dropped in, and while they were singing the last hymn before the address a tall big man with a large beard, and wearing a shaggy great-coat, entered and took a seat just inside the door. My husband said he was struck by his face from the first—it was so expressive; and he joined most heartily in the singing, in a strong Scotch accent, and listened to the address as though he were hanging on every word. Not that I see anything remarkable in that,” Mrs. Forsyth put in, “for Simeon has a wonderful gift for speaking to little gatherings of the poor and ignorant—he always makes

the Truth so clear and simple for them. And when it was over he came up and shook hands and thanked Mr. Forsyth so warmly for the lessons he had brought out that he thought within himself, 'This must be the hungry soul I was sent to meet !' so he laid his hand on the other's shoulder and spoke a few words of Christian counsel, just in a friendly way, which were listened to very seriously and reverently, and after again expressing his gratitude the Scotchman, as he seemed to be, asked for Simeon's address, which of course was given him, with a hearty invitation to call ; but he said nothing to indicate who he was or where he came from, and the mistress of the cottage said she had never seen him before. Simeon was deeply interested in him, and so was I when he told me about it. 'I feel sure there is a history in that man's life,' he said ; and oh ! dear me, we have often laughed since at the stories we made up to ourselves about him. Perhaps he had been on the point of committing a crime, we said ; or he might have just gone through some great sorrow, or been in some deep spiritual conflict, and Mr. Forsyth's words had brought him peace ; and then we would conclude with, 'Never mind, we shall know all about it when he calls.' But he never did call—the old Scotchman with the bushy beard and shaggy great-coat that we watched and waited for so long ; and my husband felt quite disappointed ; but I used to say to him, 'Never mind, dear ; I feel sure that this was a case of bread cast upon the waters, and that you will find it again after many days.'

"I must tell you, Miss Hastings, that it had been long the desire of Simeon's heart, and indeed of mine too, to labour among the home heathen of London or one of our great cities. Not that he was dissatisfied with his post at Garscombe—his whole soul was in his labours among his prison-flock, and he was not without signs of blessing on them ; but still we often said that if it should ever please God to provide him with a living, say in the east of London, it would be the fulfilment of our dearest wishes. So you may imagine what a joyful surprise it was, and how we thanked our heavenly Father, when one day in the following May Simeon got a letter from a firm of London lawyers offering him, on behalf of Mr. Nigel Lennox, the living of St. Dorcas's, the new mission church which that gentleman had just built in the East End ! He would hardly believe at first that there had not been some mistake, for how in the world, he said, did Mr. Nigel Lennox know anything about *him* ? The letter must have been intended for some other Mr. Forsyth. But I told him, 'Nonsense, Simeon. We asked for this and it has come ; that is all. You are as bad as the people who went to church to pray for rain and were all in dismay when they came out and found it pouring, because they had brought no umbrellas !'

"He thought it would be as well to see the church and parsonage before finally accepting, so he and I went up to London for a week, and the day after our arrival we were invited to dine with the patron of the living at Cromwell Gate. We were lodging near the Strand, so we took the train to South Kensington, and then walked

to Mr. Lennox's. You have never seen it, I think ; it is a splendid house in the Queen Anne style—at least, it looks just like those new-old red-brick mansions that they call "Queen Anne's" houses, but Mrs. Mortis says it is properly a Caroline house. Don't think me dreadfully ignorant, dear Miss Hastings, but what is a *Caroline* house ? Is it the sort of house Queen Caroline lived in ? "

"Rather the sort of house King Charles lived in," I said, "or at least that was built in his time."

"Really now ! Thank you for telling me. But to go on ; as we drew near the door a carriage and pair with extremely showy liveries dashed up to it, and a gentleman got out and handed down a lady so gorgeously dressed that I thought we must have been invited to a dinner-party instead of a quiet evening with an unmarried gentleman,—not knowing that this was Mrs. Mortis's usual style of evening dress,—and looked with dismay at my old black silk gown. I pay very little attention to dress, my dear Miss Hastings" (that is self-evident, my dear Mrs Forsyth !), "and as to the fashions, I do not concern myself about them at all ; neither, I am pleased to see, do you ; but that black silk was scarcely fit even to go out to tea at Garscombe in. It had been my best for years, and had been turned and re-made over and over again, and the last time it was done up I entrusted it to a young dressmaker who had just come out of prison ; she was not a very good work-woman, and she charged me more than the person I generally employed, but as she was willing to try to

earn an honest living, poor thing, I felt it a duty to give her a helping hand. But she misfitted me shockingly, and never took a bit of pains to hide the slits or worn places, so that you may imagine how it would appear beside Mrs. Mortis's magnificence. However, I said to myself, 'It is Mr. Lennox that we are concerned with, and if he is the sort of man we have been given to understand, he won't trouble himself about the outside of the cup and platter !' and went boldly up to the door ; but when it was opened, what with the lights and flowers and men-servants, and the sight of Mrs. Mortis's glittering train trailing up the stairs in front of us, we were quite confused, and actually forgot our own names for the moment when we were asked for them !

"At the drawing-room door our host met us, all smiles and friendliness and outstretched hands, and to my amazement Simeon looked perfectly bewildered. 'Well, Mr. Forsyth,' said Mr. Lennox ; 'we met last under rather different circumstances !' and then as I looked at him it all of a sudden flashed upon me,—I wonder I did not come out with it,—'The old Scotchman with the bushy beard !' And so it proved. The next thing was that everybody laughed, and then we had to learn that Mr. Lennox was as much astonished at our surprise as we were at his identity with Simeon's mysterious hearer ; he fancied we must have discovered that long ago, and had no idea, as Mrs. Mortis said, of playing the Lord of Burleigh. He was driving back to Southminster that evening after being all day at the works, when his conveyance broke

down and he had to walk, and having by what we call accident taken the wrong turning in the dark he got into the road leading past the place where the meeting was being held, and was attracted into it by the singing, with the result that he made up his mind Simeon was just the man for the church he was then building in London. Afterwards he made inquiries about us of the Vicar of Garscombe, who never told us, as Mr. Lennox took for granted he had done, thinking it would be such a dreadful disappointment to us if it came to nothing after all. 'So that's the end of our old Scotchman!' Mr. Forsyth said as we went back to our lodgings. 'Yes,' I said, 'and the beginning of your getting what you have desired all these years. I'm so glad,' I couldn't help telling him, 'that you didn't take my advice and stay at home!'

"Not that our new sphere has been quite what we expected," Mrs. Forsyth confessed, a little while afterwards. "The people, poor things, are very hard to win, and we don't find that poverty and degradation make them any readier to receive the Gospel message, as we used to fancy was the case when we only knew work of this kind from the accounts we read of it in magazines. Indeed, Simeon feels a good deal depressed about it at times, but I suppose it is a lesson we needed to learn, that there must be a certain amount of disappointment in the attainment of even our best and purest wishes."

I was not surprised to hear her say this. Yesterday, when Mr. Lennox was speaking to Dr. Tempest

of the good work "his friend Forsyth" was carrying on in the East End slums, I noticed such a humbled, downcast look upon that good man's face; as of one who feels he is receiving credit to which he is not entitled. I felt quite sorry for him, but I think he may be partly himself to blame; he must have set out there in utter inexperience, and has not, I suspect, from some remarks he and his wife have let drop, distributed the large sums which Mr. Lennox and Mrs. Mortis allow him for the relief of the poor in the most judicious manner possible. Perhaps I may be able to give him a useful hint or two when our acquaintance-ship has got a little more consolidated.

"One good gift at any rate we have to be thankful for," Mrs. Forsyth continued,— "the friendship of dear Mr. Lennox, who has shown us throughout the most generous and thoughtful kindness."

"I do not know him as well as you do," I said, "but he strikes me as being the very kindest person I ever met."

"That is just what we always say! And it has been the same with him all along, from the very beginning down to last evening, when he met the children coming home tired from their walk and carried the two younger ones right up to Windy Nook, one on each shoulder—just like Mr. Greatheart in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' my Eunice said. Oh! he's very, very nice; but don't you think, dear Miss Hastings, that he's just a little bit too jocular? It seems *hardly* consistent in a Christian, does it?"

I fired up at this proposition. "Oh! don't say that!" I exclaimed, with superabundant vehemence I fear, for my poor friend looked quite taken aback. "It is that very quality that attracts me to him most. To an easily depressed, almost gloomy disposition, as I know mine is, contact with that bright buoyant nature acts like a tonic; it carries me out of myself and revives and invigorates me like the breeze from his own moors. Don't you think that the capacity for innocent mirth is a talent that may be consecrated to God's service just as much as music or oratory or any other natural gift? I often think, if I had it, how it would help me in my work, especially among the young."

"Well, I daresay there is something in that!" Mrs. Forsyth admitted. "Indeed, I have seen examples of it in clergymen I have known. But I don't think we are all expected to be so lively; and, indeed, in this world of sin and sorrow I don't see how any earnest-minded person can be very lighthearted."

I told her how I had once heard a lady say that she wondered how a clergyman could ever smile, and a very devoted one who overheard her rejoined, "My dear friend, if I didn't smile sometimes I couldn't be a clergyman at all—I should simply sink under the strain of responsibility; and to forbid me such relaxation would be as false economy as that which sent the regimental pipers before Sebastopol to help their comrades in the trenches. It was meant in kindness, but the loss of their music, the one thing the poor

fellows had to cheer and inspirit them, proved the last straw that broke down the men's endurance."

"Well, a bit of fun does do one good sometimes," my companion conceded.

"That granted," I said, "isn't it much nicer to have our fun 'made' for us, as we say,—just as if fun was an article of commerce!—by a brother in the faith than by an outsider?" ("In which case it must be more or less like the crackling of thorns under a pot," Mrs. Forsyth put in parenthetically.) "And then," I continued, waxing mighty eloquent on a subject which, now I come to think of it, I was now pondering for the first time in my life, "we must remember that there are many earnest-minded people who, while they grieve over the sin and misery of the world, and in their own sphere exert themselves nobly, as Mr. Lennox does, for its suppression, yet do not come into personal contact with it like—ourselves, for instance, and cannot know the heart-ache you and I feel when Tom Smith goes back to the public-house after all our exhortations and his own sick-bed vows, or when Polly Green gets led astray in spite of all our love and watchfulness."

"That's just it! Oh, Miss Hastings, how well you understand it all!" exclaimed the clergyman's wife, grasping my hand, while her eyes filled with sympathetic tears. "That very dressmaker—but there, I won't depress you and myself by going into that now. We must have a long chat about our work some day. Do come up and see us soon again—come one afternoon

and stay to tea. My husband will enjoy a talk with you."

Of course I said I would. Yes indeed, dear good Mrs. Forsyth; how nice it is of you to care about having me!—when I think of it I could blush for what I wrote just now about the Red Indian,—and how sweet and humble you must be to listen so meekly as you did while I laid down the law in that pragmatic style to you, my senior and a clergyman's wife! Looking back upon it, I feel quite ashamed of my own assurance.

* * * * *

A letter from Fanny. Mr. Langhorne is free from the Market Street toils at last, and they are going away next week. As they have waited so long for a change, she says, they mean to have a thorough one, and have fixed on a visit to Dieppe, with some idea of going on to Paris before they come home, where I might, if I feel inclined, Fanny adds, join them. Thank you, Fanny, but I don't think I *shall* feel inclined; not as long as I can stay here, certainly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BAUCIS AND PHILEMON.

IT would be difficult to say whether Miss Hastings or Margaret Cheyne derived most pleasure from the friendship which had sprung up between them. We have seen how much Agatha's enjoyment of the loveliness around her was enhanced by the little girl's companionship, and Daisy on her part was quite romantically in love with her new friend. She thought no picnic or pleasure-party from the Castle complete unless Miss Hastings shared it, as indeed she generally did ; and it is a wonder that her Uncle Nigel did not grow weary of her endless rehearsal of Miss Hastings' perfections. It was *so* nice to go out with Miss Hastings, Daisy said ; she knew such splendid poetry and such lovely tales, and she was teaching Daisy wonderful lessons about the growth of the ferns and mosses and the formation of the rocks. And Miss Hastings had a ready answer for all her questions—she was not like Robina, who often met them with the chilling rejoinder, “A child like you would not understand if I was to tell you ;” nor like Mr. Micklejohn, who always gave his information in such long words that she was no

wiser at the end than at the beginning. And then she never laughed, as some grown-up ladies did, at Daisy's quaint fancies, but talked to her just as one friend might to another. "And we agree on a great many subjects," the young lady complacently remarked one day.

"What a sensible woman Miss Hastings must be!" was Nigel's comment, with a sly twinkle of his blue-grey eyes. "Let's hear some of the points you and she agree upon."

"One is that she delights so in everything out of doors—natural things, I mean," was Daisy's answer; "not merely the great grand sights that everybody admires, like sunsets and waterfalls and mountains, but all the little common things—the scarlet rowan-berries, and the purple stems of the fir-trees, and the bright-coloured puddock-stools,* and the brown water of the burn—she says they all help to make her happy."

"And is that Daisy-chain's experience?"

"Yes," she answered with calm assurance. "When I am on the hills here, or in the Birken Glen, sometimes I feel—oh! I couldn't tell you how—but just as I do when I'm listening to a beautiful tune, or looking at a lovely painting."

"Or eating a piece of Mrs. Elworthy's cake, eh?" suggested her uncle.

"No," said Daisy seriously; "for when the cake was done there would be an end of it, but this kind of pleasure gives me something to think of for weeks afterwards. I used to be afraid it was childish to care

* Toad-stools.

so much for such trifles, but Miss Hastings says we are all God's little children, and the world of nature is our great playground, which He has filled full of beautiful things for us to enjoy—like a good man she once read of who used to put pictures in the waste paper-basket for his little boys to find. Only *our* playthings are useful as well as pretty, Miss Hastings says, and that when people talk about Decorative Domestic Art,—I think that's the expression,—and of making all their household furniture ornamental, they are only copying what God did in the creation of the world."

"That's fine, lassie, and as true as it's fine. Ye hae a gude memory."

"I always remember what Miss Hastings says. I wish you had heard her yesterday, uncle. She took the Crannoch Sunday-school, because Lady Kintail had a headache, and we had such a nice lesson."

"Sae I should imagine," said her uncle.

"Yes, she's a capital teacher—a much better one than Lady Kintail," said Daisy, who was something of a connoisseur in Sunday-school teaching. "She began by saying she was going to tell us a story of old times, and we were to try and find out if we had ever met with any of the characters in it before. Long ago, she said, a boy was growing up in a quiet little town in an out-of-the-way country district where the inhabitants were very simple, ignorant sort of people. His mother did not belong to the place, though she was married there and had brought her own old mother

to live with her, and Miss Hastings said, most likely she did not care for him to play with the boys and girls of the town much, or to listen to the sort of tales they used to tell one another, for these were often wicked tales, and not fit to be told ; and then he could read much nicer ones at home in an old book of his grandmother's. She had brought it with her from a beautiful country far away where she had lived when she was young, and it was full of wonderful histories—accounts of kings and heroes, of fights with giants and lions, of great battles and hairbreadth escapes, and of shining visions sent to cheer lonely people ; and there were simple home-stories in it too, stories about brothers and sisters, their love and quarrels, stories about herd-boys and servant-girls, and many more that even a child could understand. Now among the tales the children of the place used to repeat there was just one that was really simple and pretty, and that had a beautiful meaning behind it if they could have understood it. It was about an old man and his wife who were said to have lived in a little cottage somewhere in the neighbourhood ; very poor, humble people, with nothing remarkable about them except that they loved one another and were kind to those who needed help. One evening two strange men came to their door and asked a night's lodging, and the good old couple took them in and entertained them as best they could, and when they woke up in the morning they found their poor hut transformed into a glorious palace full of splendour and beauty, for the unknown strangers

were immortal beings who had come down to earth in the likeness of men, and they had turned the cottage into a temple, of which the old man and his wife were to be priest and priestess for the rest of their lives, till they were taken away to a still better and happier place. And ever since then the people of those parts had talked to each other about this wonderful story, and hoped and watched for another visit from those mysterious guests, who had such marvellous gifts in their power; and when that little half-foreign boy would go home and repeat the tale as he had heard it from the children of the town, it would remind his grandmother of how in her old home they had always been expecting a glorious stranger to arrive, who was to do great things for them and deliver them from all their enemies, and they had looked and waited for him so long that they had begun to fear he would never come at all.

“Time went on, and the little boy had become a big lad, and had read all the stories in his grandmother’s book so often that he almost knew them by heart, when one day the news went round that the long-looked-for visitors had come at last, for two strangers had appeared who were evidently something more than common men; if they had not turned a cottage into a palace they had done something quite as wonderful—they had made a lame man walk, and all the people gathered round them, crying out, ‘The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!’ And then we knew—at least Trip Forsyth and I did, if the little

ones didn't—that Miss Hastings had been telling us about Paul and Barnabas and Timothy. And she says the story is quite true, not that all that about the old man and his wife really happened, but that the people there believed it and repeated it to each other."

"And was that all the lesson, demikie?"

"Oh! no, uncle; Miss Hastings made us read part of the Fourteenth of Acts, and we talked of how Timothy afterwards learnt to know and love St. Paul till at last he became like his own son, and of the joy his old grandmother must have felt at hearing that the Great Hope of her countrymen had been fulfilled at last. Trip said she thought it must have been very disappointing to the people of the town to learn that the beautiful story they had believed in so long was only a fable after all, but Miss Hastings said no, no more than it would be a disappointment to children who had been taken to see some grand sight or exhibition, and, after staring a long time at what they thought was the sight itself, found that they had only been looking at the picture of it on a screen or curtain. When that was drawn aside and they discovered that it had only given them a faint idea of the *real* sight behind it, they would not mind knowing that the picture was not real. The fable of Baucis and Philemon, Miss Hastings said, was only a faint representation of the real truth, and Paul and Barnabas had come to take the picture away and show the people what was behind it; to tell them that their own words were right, only in a much higher and better sense

than they dreamed of, for the Great God *had* come down in the likeness of men, and the home of every man and woman, every boy and girl who believed in Him, would be turned into a palace, for it would be the dwelling of a king's child."

"Eh! that was grand, Daisy my woman; and yon was a bonny tale o' the auld mon and his wife. I daursay noo, he wadna have cared a plack for the braw hoose they changed his bit shieling intil if they hadna left him his gude wife to keep him company."

"I suppose not," Daisy replied, wondering what had suggested to her uncle this apparently irrelevant reflection. "That reminds me," she went on presently, "of something Miss Hastings said when Trip and I were talking to her after the little ones had gone away. We were saying how ignorant the people must have been in those old dark heathen times, and she said 'Yes; and what they did know only went a very little way. It might do something—not much—for some of them in this world, but it could do nothing beyond it; even those who had all that they could possibly desire to give them happiness never expected it to last any longer than their lives; but now, when the dearest friends are parted and the happiest homes broken up, those who suffer most can look forward to a good time coming and sing,—

"Love will be with us for ever then."'"

"Ay," said Nigel solemnly. "And *that's* true too—thank God for it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

SPECIMENS OF CHARACTER.

FRESH and pure and life-giving blew the wind over the valley of Glen Irvine, sweeping away the white mists that clung about the giant shoulders of the Ben, and flinging far and wide the spray of the many torrents that poured down its sides; fluttering Mr. Forsyth's papers as he sat preparing his sermon by the open window at Windy Nook; strewn the ground outside with carven fir-cones and vermilion rowan-clusters for his children to pick up and rejoice over; and bringing a tinge of colour to Agatha Hastings' pale cheeks as she sat with Daisy on a flat boulder half-way down one of the braes. They had been for a long morning's ramble over the hills, having found the air too sharp to sit sketching, and were resting for a few minutes before beginning their last homeward mile. They were richly laden with spoils from heath and wood, intended for the adornment of the Castle, a duty which by her own special desire always devolved upon Daisy when she stayed there. Her mother disdained wild flowers, and never admitted them to the drawing-room at The

Mains, but Uncle Nigel delighted in them, and did not mind how many vases and soup-plates she filled with these sweepings of the big playground. He had lately noticed a marked improvement in the general effect of her bouquets, which was in fact owing to Miss Hastings having pointed out to her the beauty of form and colour resident in many a humble and hitherto despised herb of the field. Agatha, besides her great sheaf of greenery, so large that she had to balance it on one arm like a baby, carried a dainty little fern root tenderly in her hand. "I am going to send this to one of my girls at Stockhampton," she remarked. "I had a letter from her this morning which I shall answer to-morrow. I daresay it will not live, but it will interest her for a time to plant it in a pot and care for it,—there are no ferns for miles round Stockhampton."

"I wish you would tell me some pretty stories about the poor children you teach there, Miss Hastings," Daisy requested.

"I'm afraid I don't know any, dear," replied Agatha, with just a touch of sadness in her tone.

Daisy looked puzzled. "I thought people who visited among the poor always had plenty of anecdotes to tell about ragged boys and girls who sold things in the streets or lay ill in garrets and were wonderfully good and happy."

"My experience has not been large enough to include any of those interesting cases as yet," said Miss Hastings. "No, there is very little that is 'pretty' in the lives of my poor boys and girls, and

much on the contrary that is ugly and sad, too sad for you to hear of, Daisy. I can't say that any of them are wonderfully good; indeed, some of them are wonderfully naughty, but I do believe that a few of them are trying to do right and to rise above themselves, which is much harder work than a young girl in your position can even form an idea of. But you may read Angelina's letter if you like; I have it in my pocket, only you must not criticise her writing and spelling, for I consider her a very creditable pupil—a year ago she could not write at all. You will be able to make it out, I think, but I must explain to you that 'Mother Hubbard' is Angelina's corruption of *St. Mary Abbott's*, the old parish church of Stockhampton. Poor Angelina!" and the speaker glanced affectionately at the dirty, crookedly-scrawled, and unevenly-folded note she handed to her young companion.

Daisy was much amused with its contents; perhaps some of my readers who are not in the habit of corresponding with young ladies in Miss Angelina Wiggins's class of life may be so also. I have added a few stops to elucidate the sense; the original letter contained none.

"dere mis astins, this comes opin yo har quit wel, has it levs me hat present and hall ov us eksept gramther, wot av got the rumickets very bad. she want to go in the firmitory, cos she dont like to pose upon father, but father he say wile he av the price of a pint of beer the pore old gal shall av an ome

with hus. emly purkises mother as got another ; that meks 7, and er father rinch is hankel darncein outside the swan the nex nite, and he is gon in the horsepistol. her arnt beka joined the plej agin yestiday hat the mother ubbards temprince meetin. i ope it will not be as wen she joined it larst wik ; the lady as she work for tuk her there and giv her a nu par ov boots too go in, and she ad a glass coming ome to wet them. she says this is the 10th time and it will be lucky. dere mis, i wish yo wos cum bac ; it seem so dul in the pek without yo goin habout. it is gitin dark and we har out ov candles til mother cums hin, so no mor hat presint, from your effecshnit scoler anjaliner wigens, crux pek, stokamton.

“i do try too be a good gurl.

i ham a litel sojer and honly 15 years hold,

i mene too fite for jeses hand war a crown ov goald.

he shal gather the lams in is harms.”

“I think, Daisy-chain, you might take turn about and tell me some stories!” Agatha remarked as they went down the hill together. “Have you no wonderful idiot here with whose sayings and doings you can entertain me? I thought ‘the gowk’ was an institution in every Scotch village.”

“Oh! haven’t you seen Daft Donald yet, Miss Hastings? Uncle Nigel was saying he must introduce you to him—him to you, I mean. I daresay we shall meet him presently, for he’s generally sitting about somewhere eating his dinner at this time, and we are close to his master’s farm. Yes, there’s his

blue bonnet at the foot of the brae !” she cried, looking over the edge of the path.

“ Not that boy sitting on the grass with the little girl ? ” said Agatha.

“ Oh ! no—that’s Pe-she-he Pe-she-she.”

“ That’s *what*, Daisy ? ”

Margaret laughed. “ *That’s* a good story ! ” she said. “ They are Macleod the shepherd’s children. He was very ill once, a long time ago, with some strange sort of complaint that no doctor could do anything for, till Uncle Nigel—it was before he bought Glen Irvine, but he was often in the neighbourhood—heard of one in the south of England who understood such cases, and he paid for Macleod to go to the town where he lived and stay there till he was cured. The day he came home, on his way from Blackden here, he met a friend who told him Mrs. Macleod had got a new baby, and he declared it should be called after Uncle Nigel, because he felt so grateful to him. Then the other said he didn’t know whether it was a boy or a girl, but Macleod said—he’s a Highlander, you know, and has never learnt to speak English properly—‘ Pe she he, pe she she, she pe Nigel Lennox Macleod ! ’ And when he got to his cottage he found there were twins ! So he called the boy Nigel and the girl Lennox, but we often say when we see them, ‘ There goes Pe-she-he Pe-she-she ! ’ ”

By this time they had reached the spot where Daft Donald was sitting. He had finished his *al fresco* meal and was occupied with a curiously-fashioned stick or

club which lay across his knees, and which he stroked caressingly, as though it had been a live creature, chuckling and muttering to himself the while.

"Well, Donald," said Daisy, with a patronizing air.

"Weel, Miss Marget," rejoined the *halflin*, too much absorbed in his new plaything to give her more than a passing greeting.

"Here is an English lady come to speak to you," "Miss Marget" informed him, and Agatha held out her hand with a kind "How do you do, Donald?" but Donald only scowled at her from under his blue bonnet, and muttered that he "didna like English leddies." Only the day before he had been made sport of by some giggling girls in a party of Birmingham tourists who had come across him on the mountains, and having put some questions to him, had soon discovered his deficiency, and the insult still rankled in his breast.

"How can you be so rude and silly, Donald?" expostulated Daisy. "What would Uncle Nigel say if he heard you? He can talk so nicely sometimes," she added to Miss Hastings, not very wisely. "He knows all about *The Light of the World*, and what the different parts of it mean. Your bonnie picture in the Institute, you know, Donald," she went on coaxingly. "Tell the lady what the licht in the booet means."

"It means that if ye dinna atten' to yer buiks, Miss Marget—" began Donald, a little maliciously, but Daisy hastily stopped him with "Donald! how stupid you are. I'm quite ashamed of you to-day."

"Don't let us worry him any more now, Daisy," said

Agatha in a low tone. "I do not like the idea of making a show of the poor fellow's religious knowledge."

"Eh! What's this I hear?" cried a well-known voice behind them. "Donal won't speak to Miss Hastings? Hootawa, man, but that's unco ill-faured o' ye!"

Donald looked a little shamefaced, but repeated his uncomplimentary assertion regarding English ladies.

"Eh, but this is a douce kind leddy that's aye deein' for folks and luikin' after puir queanies and loonies* that hae nane to tell them o' onything gude. Ye wadna be sae unmannerly as no to gie her a ceevil answer whan she speyks till ye?"

Donald was still silent.

"Donal, lad," said Mr. Lennox, drawing nearer to him and speaking more earnestly, "do ye ken, it was frae this leddy I learnt a' I tellt ye aboot yon picture that ye loe sae weel?"

In a moment the obdurate face changed; kindled into brightness by the touch as it were of that Divine-human nature that makes the whole world kin. "Dis she ken Him wi' the booet?" he asked in a loud, awe-struck whisper.

"Ay does she!" replied his friend, not sparing Agatha's blushes, which were coming thickly.

"Eh! I didna ken that!" exclaimed Donald; and holding out his great flabby hand to the English lady, he said cordially, "Hoo are ye, mem? I'm glad to see ye. I like ye, if naebody else does!"

* Girls and boys.

Daisy tittered, but Agatha, even more touched than amused, answered gravely, "Thank you, Donald, that is very kind of you."

"See ma club!" said Donald, holding it out for her inspection in further token of amity. "Maister gied it to me yestreen; he said I was a gude lad, and he kent I wad tak' care o't. It was the auld herd's ance."

"And a curiosity in its way," remarked Mr. Lennox. "That's a relic of the days, Miss Hastings, when our farmers didn't confine their cattle within fields as they mostly do now, but sent them ranging about at will under the charge of a herd who was always armed with a club like this. Do ye ken what these stand for, Donal?" and he pointed to the thick end of the implement, on which was rudely carved a tiny figure of a man flourishing a whip, succeeded by a row of Roman numerals apparently set down at random.

"Yon's me, and yon's the owsen," explained Donald proudly. "And I can say the screed* aboot it," he added, with increasing self-complacency. "Young Sandy teached it till me.

"'Twa afore ane, an' three afore five;
First twa, an' syne twa, an' four comes belyve,†
Noo ane, an' than ane, an' three at a cast;
Dooble ane, an' twice twa, an' Donal at the last!'"

Donald brought out the concluding line with much *empressement*, at the same time swinging the club round his head with a flourish in imitation of his prototype on its handle.

* Rhyme.

† Afterwards.

"And this little mark like a monogram is a charm, isn't it?" said Daisy.

"Ay; gin I wis to hit the coos ower hard that wad save them frae bein' hurtit."

"Lees and havers, lad!" cried Nigel Lennox wrathfully. "Gin I didna ken ye were aye kind and canny wi' the coos I wad e'en gie yer maister a flytin * for lettin' ye hear sic balderdash. Trust na to cantrips, † Donal, but trust in God and dee your duty, and syne a'll gang weel wi' ye and wi' the coos forbye. I canna abide superstition!" he said to Agatha as they walked away, after taking a friendly farewell of Donald. "It's a' lees, and I hate lees. In fact, I'm sorry to say that I whiles come vera near to hating leears."

"Donald wouldn't tell a 'lee' to save his life," remarked Daisy.

"*What's* that ye said?" demanded her uncle, facing round upon her sharply; it was a strict rule both at Glen Irvine and The Mains that Daisy was on no account to talk broad Scotch, whatever her elders might do.

"I said it in a quotation," was her exculpatory plea.

"I believe ye!" said Nigel, after one searching glance into her transparent countenance. "I dinna think ye tell lees ony mair than Donal, pur callant. He's an *innocent* in mair senses than one. He always reminds me, Miss Hastings, of the words, 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

"In some parts of the country they call an idiot *God's baby*," said Agatha. "I suppose Donald is hardly an

* Scolding.

† Charms.

idiot, though. Such characters are like plants grown in a cellar, that develop only in one direction, and that an upward one."

"*God's babies*," Nigel repeated thoughtfully. "Can ye remember thae verses ye said to me once about 'the Gorbal o' the Nest,' Daisy? I'm sure Miss Hastings would like them."

"It was only a little common piece out of the Murkleton paper, uncle; not worth repeating to Miss Hastings, who knows so many great poets by heart!"

"That would not prevent me from enjoying the small ones even if it were true, Daisy," said Agatha. "They have their own places in the Temple of Poetry just as much as the master-singers."

"And who is the great singer of all, Miss Hastings?" asked Daisy.

" 'God Himself is the chief Poet,
And the Real is His song,' "

Agatha answered reverently. "But I want to hear your little song now, please, Daisy-chain."

And Daisy began,— *

"Oh, dinna look ye pridefu' doon on a' aneath your ken,
For he wha seems the farthest *but* aft wins the farthest *ben*;
And whiles the doubie o' the schule tak's lead o' a' the rest,
The birdie sure to sing is aye the gorbai o' the nest.

The cauld grey misty morn aft brings a sunny summer day,
The tree wha's buds are latest is longest to decay:
The heart sair tried wi' sorrow still endures the sternest test,
The birdie sure to sing is aye the gorbai o' the nest.

* The following verses are taken from a Scotch provincial paper.

The wee, wee stern that glints in heaven may be a lowin' sun,
 Though like a speck o' licht it seem amid the welkin dun ;
 The humblest sodger on the field may win a warrior's crest,
 The birdie sure to sing is aye the gorb'al o' the nest.

Then dinna be impatient wi' your bairnie when he's slow,
 And dinna scorn the humble though the warld deem them low ;
 Earth's hindmost and her feeblest aft become God's first and
 best,
 The birdie sure to sing is aye the gorb'al o' the nest."

"Thank you, Daisy ; that is very pretty and touching, and has given me great pleasure."

"I tauld ye sae, Daisy-chain !" chuckled her uncle. "Weel, Mistress McTaggart, and are ye wantin' to speak with me ?" This question was addressed to a red-faced, slatternly woman, who stood at the door of a cottage they were passing, evidently desirous of claiming his attention.

"If it's no troublin' ye, I wuss we wad come in and say a wurrud to my sin* Tam, Mr. Lennox," she requested in a shrill, excited tone. "The ill-contriven loon's wuntin' awa to thae cousins o' his at Blackden again—a pack o' drucken sweirin' widdifu's†—it's eneuch to brak my hert that's had affleections eneuch a'ready, wi' ae man deein' an' anither rinnin' awa frae me ! He says it's my tongue that's drivin' him oot o' the hoose, the graceless lad ! And it's the truth I'm tellin' ye that, let him gang oot or in or but or ben, I never said to him ocht nor aye nor tee nor frae, nor black's the

* Son.

† *Widdifu*, rascal ; literally, rope-ful, gallows bird.

ee that's in his head." (This sentence was rattled off at the utmost speed, as though it were a kind of self-exculpatory formula.) "But I can dee naething wi' him, and he wunna listen to Dr. Garden; in fac', it's juist awful to hear him talk. He says the days are gone by noo for men to be tied till a meenister's apron-strings or ony ither auld wife's! To think o' that!" and Mrs. McTaggart chuckled over her son's witticism, evidently a little proud of it in spite of its indecorous character. "But if ye wad gie 'im a bit o' advice, Mr. Lennox, or aiblins"—this was said coaxingly—"fin' him some wark hereabouts for a wee, he micht—I see ye, ye little cuttie!" she broke off to a child whose flaxen head peeped round the wall of the cottage. "Ye'se come in wi' me and get yer licks, or it'll be the waur for ye!"

"What for is she to get them?" asked the laird. "I dinna like lassies to be licket."

"She broke twa pigs for me eenoo," replied Leezie's mother, somewhat puzzling Miss Hastings, till she remembered that earthenware jars were called "pigs" in Scotland, "the careless limmer.* Little help she is till her puir mither that's waur than a widdy," she announced loudly for the benefit of the culprit, who had retired out of sight, but was probably still within hearing; "and her sister Effie's less still, for she thinks of naething but the loons, the idle quean! And whan I gave her a word o' gude advice aboot it, she had the impidence to tell me, 'Ye got twa husbands for yoursel', mither, sae

* Hussy.

ye micht let ither fowks get ane!' And her only saxteen!"

"Weel, weel, I'll come and speyk to Tam gin ye'll let Leezie aff her licks," Mr. Lennox engaged, and he followed his voluble tenant into her cottage, while his companions walked on.

"What a tongue!" exclaimed Miss Hastings. "I don't wonder Tam finds it overpowering."

"Her last husband ran away from her because of it," said Daisy. "She's a dreadful woman. She gets drunk herself and swears awfully sometimes, though she complains so of others. She's a great trouble to Dr. Garden, and to Uncle Nigel too. And her house is in such a lovely spot, just there by the waterfall. I once heard a lady say as she passed it that she thought no one living *there* could help being good!"

Agatha sighed. The trail of the serpent again! Even in sweet Glen Irvine, as in Crook's Peak, and in those far viler haunts where Mr. Forsyth's work lay, there were dark problems to face, impracticable cases to deal with. Mr. Lennox overtook them just as they were entering the Castle gates. "I've settled it for the time!" he said. "She's to sign the pledge—just to gratify me, she says; there's no need for't whatever! Na, na, of course not! and I've promised to gie Tam wark on the grounds, but if she braks it he can gang whar he likes. I tauld her plainly he couldna be in a waur place than wi' a drunken mother."

"And wasn't she dreadfully offended?" asked Daisy, quite astonished at her uncle's boldness in venturing to

beard the redoubtable Mrs. McTaggart. "She nearly flew at Dr. Garden once when he spoke to her about her drinking."

"She kenned better than to try that wi' me!" laughed Nigel. "Ay, ay, I mind the hearing she gave the Doctor, good quiet man. Our meenister's vera conscientious in the discharge of his duties, Miss Hastings, but he is not ower-bold when he has to warn the unruly. 'But ye see, Mrs. McTaggart,' he says to her—he tauld me all aboot it, and I can just fancy the slow sort of apologizing way he would speak—'though I would be sorry to accuse ye wrongfully, I fear it's a fact that ye take a good deal more stimulant than your health requires. I've proof positive that ye've been drinking in the Mauchlin Arms once and again of late.' 'And what if I did?' quo' she. I know how she would draw herself up wi' her nose in the air. 'You a meenister and no ken yer Bible weel eneuch to remember that when the Apostle Paul came to the Three Taverns he thanked God, and took courage? Gang hame and study the Scriptures or ye bid me set mysel' up to be better than the chosen vessel!' I said to him he might have tauld her the apostle wasna chosen to be a vessel of strong drink. 'Eh!' he said, 'I wish I had thought of that.' He did make her some kind of answer, but she went on to abuse him so roundly that he was clean driven oot o' the hoose. Eh! she's a fashious wife. I wonder if you could do anything with her, Miss Hastings?"

"I can try," responded Miss Hastings, not very

hopefully ; and try she did. Without much apparent success at the time ; but it is a fact that Mrs. McTaggart was known in her latter days as a “douce and weel-conducket body,” and that her reformation was, in some measure at any rate, due to Agatha’s influence.

CHAPTER XX.

BETWEEN TWO BISHOPS.

MRS. CHEYNE and her eldest unmarried daughter were seated in the parlour at The Mains, engaged in hemming the respective sides of a sheet which was in process of being turned—Jessie always contrived to have plenty of plain needlework on hand when Robina was at home for her holidays, part of which had already been spent at Glen Irvine Castle. She was a clever, well-informed young woman, with a fairly lady-like manner and plenty of *sang froid* and knowledge of the world—rather more perhaps than one expects or cares to meet at five-and-twenty. The elder lady's brows were wrinkling over her work, for Robina in describing the various doings at the Castle had casually mentioned Miss Hastings' frequent visits to it, and the high esteem in which she was held both by Mr. Lennox and Daisy. Miss Hastings! Jessie remembered the name well, and the suspicions it had once awakened within her, and she proceeded to question her daughter closely, but without any satisfactory result. Robina had not been sufficiently interested in her sister's paragon to form any special

opinion of her. Was she pretty? Some people thought so; Robina could not see it. Young? Not very; older than herself at any rate. Clever? Well, she must be, since she had brought Daisy on so in her drawing, but rather romantic and fanciful. "She tells Daisy fairy-tales—only fancy!" declared Miss Cheyne with a little toss of her practical head. "Mamma, this sheet isn't positively worth turning! Just see how rotten it is."

"It will dee weel eneuch for Baubie," replied thrifty Jessie. "Her bed's ower comfortable noo, I'm thinkin', frae the wark I hae to get her oot o't mornin's, the lazy cuttie! I wish ye wad just repeat your uncle's message again, Robina, aboot my going to the Castle."

"He said he hoped you would come either next Monday or the Monday after, and stay for a week, as I am here to take your place."

"I'll go next Monday," said her mother with decision.

"If you wait till the week after, mamma, you'll meet the Bishop of Chadminster."

Mrs. Cheyne looked unsettled again. "Eh! I wad like that though, Robina," she said. "When I was there wi' him three years ago I thought him the maist agreeable, gentlemanlike man I'd ever seen."

"That's what he's famous for," remarked her daughter.

"And will there be anybody particular at the Castle next week?"

"Nobody with a title except the Bishop of Paramatta; he's only a colonial bishop, and a self-made man like Uncle Nigel."

Jessie stitched away for a time in silence, sorely perplexed. The society of the Bishop of Chadminster, with the subsequent pleasure of retailing to her Murkleton friends the sayings and doings of that highly-polished and amiable prelate, was too tempting a *bonne bouche* to be lightly foregone; on the other hand, if there was really any female design on foot upon her brother's person and property, no time was to be lost in its detection and frustration.

"I'll sleep upon it," she at last decided, aloud; "and ye can write to your uncle the morn, Robina."

Mrs. Cheyne's sleep that night proved rather a waking, for it was well into the small hours before her eyes closed. Poor Rob, wakened from his own slumbers by her uneasy tossings and heavy sighs, ventured mildly to suggest, "Cud ye no' cast your burden on the Lord, Jessie my dear, fat e'er it be?" but was crushed by the tart reply that "it was fine for him to say that, when sae mony of her burdens were of his making." Her final decision was to sacrifice the Bishop of Chadminster and go to Glen Irvine on Monday first, as she phrased it; after all, a bishop was a bishop, and the Murkleton ladies were not likely to make nice distinctions between the Home and the Colonial Episcopate. Her first business on arriving (after visiting her mother) was to seek Mrs. Elworthy, from whom she hoped to gain some idea as to the state of affairs.

Between these two ladies a friendly understanding had long existed. Mrs. Cheyne always made a point of extolling the other's valuable qualities, both to her-

self and her master, in the warmest terms, which had led Mrs. Elworthy to entertain a high opinion of her good feeling and sagacity. Jessie had a wonderful knack of showing herself off in the best light to persons with whom she was thrown for a short time; Nigel's guests would often describe her as a straightforward, sensible woman, not at all presuming, or anxious to set herself up above her station, and she had succeeded in imbuing the housekeeper with the belief that she was actuated by pure regard for her brother's interests in her anxiety to preserve him from the toils of matrimony. Mrs. Elworthy had undertaken to keep watch on her behalf over any marriageable ladies who might appear in the neighbourhood of the Castle, and to her therefore Jessie now turned, and was received with the housekeeper's usual effusive civility.

"So *very* glad to see you at the Castle again, Mrs. Cheyne! I *hope* you are quite well, and that you left Mr. Cheyne in health. Is everything in your room exactly as you like it? Pray mention it if there is anything you would wish altered. I am only sorry I could not put you nearer Miss Margaret, but all the rooms in that wing are occupied except the very small ones, and I don't know what Mr. Lennox would say if I was to give you one of them. He always likes you to have as nice a bedroom as there is in the Castle."

"Thank you, the room is vera comfortable; and I'm vera well, considerin' all things. Ye're not lookin' that well yerself, Mrs. Elworthy, and it wad be a wunner if ye did wi' sic a houseful as ye hae on your hands.

Nigel should really consider you more than he does at this time of the year, and moderate the number of his veesitors. I'm thinkin' I'll tell him so."

"Pray, pray don't say a word to him!" exclaimed Mrs. Elworthy, quite in distress. "Nothing would grieve me so deeply as for dear Mr. Lennox to limit the number of friends he pleases to make welcome on my account. It is my greatest pleasure—I may say the only one left me in this world—to do all in my power to further the wishes of my ever-kind, generous master."

"Ah! there's few like you, Mrs. Elworthy," sighed Jessie. "I don't know what Nigel wad do wi'oot you. I aye tell him you're mair useful to him than many a wife wad be. But if he must have so many staying in the Castle, at least he needna be askin' folks to his table every day in the world when they're livin' close by, as Robina says he does with the lady who's teaching Margaret to draw."

"What, Miss Hastings? Well, yes, she *has* been here a good deal, but not quite every day, I think. She is a good Christian young lady and a very superior one, and Mr. Lennox enjoys her conversation."

"Humph!" snorted Jessie. "Ye don't think she's making herself agreeable to him *with an object*, do ye, Mrs. Elworthy? You know what I mean." And Mrs. Cheyne drew nearer to her companion and peered sharply into her face.

The housekeeper looked astonished. Such an idea had never occurred to her, she said. Indeed, Miss

Hastings was in her opinion the last sort of a lady Mr. Lennox would be likely to fancy—in *that* way.

"Weel, I'm glad ye think so; but the weemen are deep, and they might easily willie-wha* him into believing they cared aboot him while all the time they were thinkin' scorn of his homely ways, and only wantin' to get their hands in his pooch. I suppose, now, ye haven't heard any of the ladies that are visiting here express an opingon aboot it? They would have more opportunities of observation than yerself."

"Ah! that reminds me, Mrs. Cheyne—I have been wanting to tell you of such a beautiful remark the Bishop of Paramatta's lady made to young Mrs. Mortis the other day. 'I always think of Mr. Lennox,' I heard her say, 'when we sing that verse in the *Benedicite*, 'O ye holy and humble men of ——'"

"Oh! gang awa wi' yer *Benny-deecitee*!" cried Jessie, breaking out into broad Scotch and impatience. "Nae disrespec' to yer Kirk, Mrs. Elworthy, but what I want to ken just noo is—Is this wumman settin' her cap at my brither or no?"

"Really I don't think there's any cause for uneasiness," said Mrs. Elworthy soothingly.

"I hope ye're right. He's my only brother, ye see, and I'm bound to all that lies in my power to prevent him makin' a fule o' himself. Women are deep, Mrs. Elworthy, and men are menseless bodies where they're concerned."

Jessie after all was disappointed in her hope of judg-

* Beguile, entice.

ing by personal observation whether Miss Hastings was a person from whom danger was to be apprehended, for the weather during her visit proved so wet and stormy as to prohibit all intercourse between Crannoch Lodge and Glen Irvine, except on one evening when the Argents and Agatha came to dinner at the Castle. On the whole, however, she thought she might return home with a light heart, a satisfactory conclusion to which she was helped by some remarks of Mr. Micklejohn's, made casually enough, on the morning of her departure.

There was not much love lost between Nigel's secretary and his sister. Jock had never quite forgiven her contemptuous rejection of his youthful suit, though the fact that he had been spared such a lot as poor little hen-pecked Robbie Cheyne's was a source of unmixed self-gratulation to him whenever he thought of that meek and much-tried individual, and her utter incapacity to appreciate her noble-minded brother was a constant irritation to him. Jessie on her part would speak scornfully of Mr. Micklejohn as "a learned fule," but nevertheless thought it prudent to keep in with him, since as Nigel's henchman she might some day find him a valuable ally. It was her practice with acquaintances, as with sheets and other serviceable articles, never to throw them aside till she had got all possible use out of them, and accordingly she took care not to notice the off-hand way in which he often treated her.

She had gone into the library in search of her brother,

and found it tenanted only by his secretary, who was sitting with his long awkward figure bent forward at an acute angle, his elbows resting on the table with an open book between them, and his face supported on his hands, while his lank fingers moved restlessly through his red hair. Mr. Lennox would have risen and set a chair for her, but Jock merely looked up for a minute, and remarking in reply to a question from her that Nigel would soon be back, resumed his occupation.

"Ye seem to hae an interesting book there, Mr. Micklejohn!" observed his *quondam* flame after an interval of silence.

"Wad ye like to leuk at it?" asked Jock, pushing it across the table towards her.

Mrs. Cheyne bent down her head to the open page, but quickly raised it again. "Ou, it's some of yer learned Greek, is it?"

"It's Greek, but no' *learned* Greek," answered Micklejohn. "In fact, it's vera bad Greek. The writers o't were, by their ain accoont, ignorant and unlearned men."

"Then I'm sure I wunner ye waste yer time upon it, Mr. Micklejohn."

"Do ye?" returned Jock drily. "It's the Greek Testament."

"And do ye ca' *that* bad Greek?" demanded Jessie. "Weel, I wunner at ye!"

"Hoot, ony minister will tell ye the same. It cudna weel be otherwise, seein' that in the time and place in whilk the New Testament was made the

Greek language had become vera corrupt and debased. Ye maun big your dyke wi' the stanes that lie at the fit o't.* That's a principle o' universal application, by virtue of which we hae in our ain Authorized Version a much finer leeterary wark than the oreeginal can pretend to be."

Mrs. Cheyne looked doubtful. Jock had taken her out of her depth, and she was not sure how far his speech was orthodox.

"I was just readin' the sayin', 'Hoo hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,'" he presently remarked. "It's aften a wunner to me that Nigel's no spoilt wi' a' the flattery that's heaped on him."

"He gets eneuch o't, whether he's spoilt by't or no!" said Jessie.

"Ay does he. Luik at a' these fine fowks that are aye comin' aboot him and makin' sae muckle o' 'm. But yestreen he was sayin' to me in a joke, like, 'Folks maun think I'm a king, whase invitations are commands, for they never refuse mine.' 'Hech!' I said. 'It's easy ca'in the deuks to the milldam.'† It's naething but self-interest. I dinna mean they're a' heepocreets, but I believe this, that frae the Kintails downwards there's nane o' them wad mak' sic a wark aboot him gif it werena for 's siller. Whisht! though—I'll mak' ane exception, and that's Miss Hastings. I dinna believe she's said ae word till 'm that cud be

* You must build your wall with the stones that lie about it.

† It's easy to drive the ducks to the pond.

construed intil a cawmpliment the hale time he's kent her. She's a gey strauchtforret young wumman."

"She's that kin' o' wumman, I suppose," said Jessie, "that wad think mair o' an artist or an author wi'oot a bawbee than o' the richest mon in the kintra that wasna 'cultured,' as they call it."

"That's her!" said Jock—an assurance eminently satisfactory to his listener. "Ye hae joodged her vera accurately on sic a short acquaintance, Mrs. Cheyne. She's as unwardly in some things as Nigel himsel'."

"Humph!" snorted Jessie. "Nigel has kent fine hoo to mak' the best o' baith warlds, ony wye. No' but what he's a weel-meanin' body, and a better leevin' ane than mony that mak's mair profession. I'm thinkin' I'll een go and luik for 'm, as he disna seem to be comin' back."

"That wumman has the saul o' a clod!" growled the old secretary to himself when the door had closed behind her. "She can nâe mair appreciate her brither than a puddock * cud read this Buik. Mrs. Elworthy, wi' a' her bit affectit ways, is worth a dizzen o' her for a warm, true heart. But I'll no waste my time thinkin' aboot weemen!" And with this unchivalrous reflection Mr. Micklejohn returned to the study of the Greek Testament.

* Frog.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SCHOOL-TREAT.

“ September, sweet September, we love thee to our hearts,
With the filling and the lading of thy homeward harvest carts,
And the shouting of thy strong men in thy latter harvest days,
And the varied voices, low or loud, of feeblers workers’ praise,
All chorusing, ‘A Harvest Home!’ To God our thanks we
raise.”

SO sings a West Country poet, and Mme. de Gasparin in one of her charming sketches of Swiss rural life says, “There are in September golden days, such as no other month brings.” Agatha Hastings had always loved September. Her pleasantest recollections of childhood, the days when there had been most *camaraderie* and least friction between herself and her brothers and sisters, were those when they went out together into the green lanes to gather blackberries, and Agatha had always felt as if the reproach of uselessness was lifted off her for the time as she emptied her little basket into the big one, which when full was carried home to Sarah on a stick between two of the boys, like the spies with their grapes, and its contents metamorphosed into pies and puddings, or jam for the winter months.

And now September had come at Glen Irvine, and the woodlands were already touched here and there with pre-kindlings of that "autumn fire" which would later on consume them in a holocaust of glowing flame. The more forward of the cornfields were fast assuming that rich bloomy tint of purplish bronze which tells of perfect ripeness, and Robert Cheyne's face was beginning to wear the anxious expression with which he habitually awaited that critical season for farmers—the *hairst*. Glen Irvine Castle was overflowing with guests, who fully appreciated the perfect freedom accorded them by their host to recreate themselves in whatever fashion seemed best in their own eyes; whether they preferred fishing, shooting, deerstalking, botanizing, sketching, or simply doing nothing, it was all one to Nigel, who never ceased to assure them that his house was Liberty Hall, and that he didn't care what they did as long as they were happy.

In the village the school-children were looking forward to their annual *fête*, which was usually held in an elevated portion of the Castle grounds, situated about a mile distant from the house, and called the Knoll, where an abundant feast was provided for them by Mr. Lennox, who, with as many guests as he could muster, always welcomed them on their arrival, and remained throughout the afternoon to superintend the arrangements and take part in the fun. After having been several times postponed,—first on account of the schoolmaster's illness, and afterwards of the uncertain weather,—a day had at last been fixed for the festival,

and the young folks were anticipating with more than their usual eagerness the delights of being allowed to run riot over that, in their eyes, paradise of beauty, the Laird's domain, through which at other times they had only a right of way, of racing up and down the steep banks, playing according to their sex at *bandy* and *kiss-in-the-ring*—or, as they call it, *jing-go-ring*—on the open lawn-like glades, rowing on the little dark tarn among the pines, and flying to and fro on the swings suspended from the strong far-reaching arms of the old oaks and beeches.

"I believe it will be fine to-morrow!" Daisy remarked to her uncle on the eve of the eventful day, as she stood looking out through the oriel window of the Spanish Room to the golden western sky.

Nigel, who was seated at the heavy old square table with his desk open before him, paused in the act of dipping his pen into the ink to ask, "Did ye remember to invite Miss Hastings here for the day?"

"Yes, and she will come and see the bairns in the afternoon, but she had made an arrangement for the morning before I spoke to her. Mrs. Forsyth has been visiting an old blind woman on the hill beyond Cran-noch Brae, and she had promised to go and read to her to-morrow, but as she feared it would be too much for her to walk there first, and then here in the afternoon, Miss Hastings offered to go instead."

"That's like her; she's aye doing for others. But now ye must run away, Daisy-chain, or else bide still a wee; I hae a letter to write."

Margaret chose the latter alternative, and when her uncle looked round after finishing his letter he perceived that she was kneeling on the window seat, her face pressed against the diamond panes, apparently lost in a reverie. He came up softly behind her, and laid his hands on her shoulders, saying, "Weel, demikie, what are ye about there? Buildin' castles in the air, eh?"

"You don't know how nice they are, uncle," replied the young lady, thus acknowledging the justice of the indictment.

"Dinna I, lassie? Hoo do ye ken that?"

"Why, Uncle Nigel! It must be a *long* time since *you* built any," returned Daisy, laughing.

"Be na too sure, my wee womanie. Auld folks are bigger fules than young anes, whiles."

"What are your castles like, uncle?"

Nigel did not answer the question, but turned her round with her face towards the chimney-piece. "See there, lassie," he said, pointing to the inscription above it. "Yon's the best castle to build our hopes on—it's no in the air, though it's in the heavens. Gif we can win yonner we maun be satisfied."

"Do you know, Uncle Nigel," remarked Daisy, by what seemed to her a perfectly natural transition, "that *howff* is almost the same word as *hof*, which is German for a *court*. Miss Hastings says so; she is teaching me a little German."

Nigel gave an involuntary start, and a cloud passed over his brow. "Ou ay," he muttered, almost testily. "There's nae en' to what Miss Hastings teaches ye. It

wad be fine for a body to hae Miss Hastings aye at their side, to tell them the meaning o' a' things, and lift them up wi' gran' thochts that wad never come into their ain thick skulls !”

Daisy could not think what he meant. “Are you angry with me, Uncle Nigel ?” she asked, half frightened at his manner.

“Na, na, my dearie,” he answered in his kindest tones, tenderly folding her in his arms and kissing her ; “Uncle Nigel’s cross and crabbit eneuch whiles, and naebody kens that better than himsel’, but he isna angry noo wi’ his Daisy-chain. Na, na. There, give him another kiss, and then be off to dress for dinner.”

It often happens—such is the infirmity of poor human nature—that almost immediately after giving utterance to the most devout sentiments, the most edifying self-depreciation, we fall into very un-Christian tempers, and so it proved on this occasion with Mr. Lennox. Good-humoured as he generally was, he could be terrible when his wrath was fairly aroused, and his young relatives, not even excepting his little favourite, had all known what it was to cower under outbursts of Uncle Nigel’s displeasure, one of which it was her misfortune to incur soon after the party from the Castle reached the Knoll on the following day. A large basketful of packets of sweeties and other small articles dear to youthful hearts, which the Laird had provided for the youngsters to race and scramble for, had got upset into the tarn, and Nigel, to use a commonplace

expression, as is only just when great people are overcome by commonplace temptations, was excessively "put out," and all the more so because he fancied that the misfortune, which was in fact purely the result of accident, had been caused by an act of disobedience to his orders on the part of his young niece. Poor Daisy vainly protested her innocence; appearances were against her, and her uncle, too much excited to inquire calmly into the case, only thought she was trying to deceive him, and sternly ordered her out of his sight—he would have no one about him who could not speak the truth.

Heart-broken, Margaret turned away, and with slow and sorrowful steps and throbbing brow retraced the path up which she had tripped so lightly only a few minutes before. To have incurred Uncle Nigel's anger was to her the worst of calamities, and the bright sunshine, and the murmur of merry voices in the distance,—for the procession from the School, having entered the grounds by the Grand Entrance, had now reached the Knoll,—seemed like mockery of her heart-ache. Near a spot where several roads diverged—one of them in the direction of Crannoch—she encountered Miss Hastings, who stood still in amazement at the sorry aspect of her pupil.

"Why, Daisy! What *is* the matter?"

"Uncle Nigel——" began Daisy, and then a sob choked her utterance. Agatha felt a sudden chill strike to her heart. "Has anything happened to him?" she exclaimed.

"Oh! no—Why, Miss Hastings, how white you look!" Daisy broke off. "Are you ill?"

"No, dear—at least, I felt faint for a moment; it is nothing now. Tell me what your trouble is about."

Margaret told her story,—her friend's arm thrown caressingly round her the while,—and received her full meed of sympathy from Agatha, who with her quick woman's wit perceived at once how the mistake had arisen, greatly to the relief of the child, who had feared that Miss Hastings being such a friend of her uncle's would refuse to believe that he could possibly be in the wrong. But Agatha's anger always burned hotly against injustice, even though the doer of it were her dearest friend and the sufferer her worst foe; for once in her life she felt thoroughly indignant with Nigel Lennox, and she continued her walk with the intention of letting him know her opinion of his conduct in very plain English.

She found the Knoll alive with merry groups of children and teachers—the latter head being a comprehensive one, and including for the day every one who had any sort of official connection with the Kirk, School, or Institute. The giver of the feast was standing a little apart from the throng, chatting with his Lordship of Chadminster, who moved politely aside—not too quickly, however, to catch her first speech, which somewhat astonished the gentle and courteous prelate—as Miss Hastings walked up to his host with a most uncompromising expression of countenance.

"Mr. Lennox," she began without any circumlocution,

"you have been terribly unjust to poor little Daisy!"

"Eh! What?" cried Nigel, the look of gratification which had lit up his face on seeing her changing to one of dismay; and he stood listening attentively, his head bent down towards her, while she went on to plead Daisy's cause.

"Eh! the *puir lassie*!" he exclaimed when she had finished; "sae she was in the right after all. Of course! I see it now as plain as daylight—that was what she was trying to tell me, and I was ower angert to take it in. It was vera ill-faured of me to be sae rampageous wi' her, poor wee womanie! I'll send after her at once."

"I wanted her to come back with me," Agatha said. "I thought I should be able to explain matters to you, but she said she felt a headache coming on and would rather go home and lie down. I shall be very happy to go and tell her that you are quite convinced of her innocence."

"What! send you trailing off to the Castle when you have but just come from Crannoch—to mak' amends for my misdeeds, too! I'll no' hear of sic a thing. I'll write a line to her and send it by one of the servants."

"Then you will deprive me of a very great pleasure," said Agatha.

"In that case I've no more to say," rejoined Mr. Lennox. "I'd rather have kept ye here, though," he added in a lower tone, "but if ye're bent on going I'll

show ye the nearest way—it's a bit rough, but you're aye one to put a stout heart to a stey brae," and not heeding her protestations against taking him from his guests, he proceeded to pioneer her down a narrow overgrown path amid copsewood and bracken, holding back the brambles that trailed across the way, and giving her his hand whenever a steep rocky bank had to be descended.

"You'll know what to say to the demikie," he remarked as they emerged upon a cleared space where they could walk side by side. "Give her just whatever message you think best. To think I could have been sae unjust and unrizzonable! And of all they fine fowks standin' by, not one to take the bairn's part or tell me I was in the wrang—only yerself, and I'm very much obliged to ye for it."

"I am just beginning to feel astonished at my own audacity," said Agatha.

"Hoot toot! Never mint at sic a thing. I like ye a' the better for speaking' oot sae plain and straucht-forret. I'd a deal rather be told of my faults to my face than have them cried up ahint my back. I've nae doot that my friends up yonner are giving me a fine character at this present meenit. But that's a sma' matter," he went on more seriously. "Only this morning I was looking at yon picture,—in the Spanish Room, you know,—and thinking how little some of our deeds will bear that Licht that's aye turned upon them—and here's just a proof o't," and he sighed so heavily that Agatha was smitten with compassion. Her sym-

pathies begin to transfer themselves from the oppressed to the oppressor, and she felt impelled to try and comfort him.

"I think," she said very softly and reverently—"speaking of that picture—there is one thing we ought always to remember; it is not only or chiefly the light in the lantern that is the Light of the World; it is the other light, the glory round the crown of thorns, that in reminding us of what He did for us shows us best what He is. The lower light that He carries in His hand reveals all our dark and evil things, but the upper one, 'the red fire of love,' that emanates from Himself, blots them out with its own brightness."

"Ah!" and Nigel drew a long breath. "That's a grand thought!" he said; adding after a pause, "Thank you, Agatha!" He had taken to calling her Agatha within the last week, and she rather liked it.

"Mr. Lennox, you really must not come with me any farther!" she exclaimed a minute or two afterwards. "I see the road now."

"There's an awkward bit of brae to come first, though," he rejoined. "Let me help ye doon that, and then ye'll be quit of me, and a good riddance! Sic an auld cankert carle is nae company for a soft-hearted young leddy like you. What are ye laughing at noo? My broad Scotch?"

"No indeed!" said Agatha, trying to repress the smile which crept over her face. "I was only amused at your very incorrect description of me. I do not

generally get the character of being soft-hearted ; and I am certainly not young, for I am nearly thirty-nine."

"Eh! What? Ye don't mean ye are as auld as that!" exclaimed Nigel. "I took ye for full ten years younger—otherwise I wouldn't have ventured to call ye *Agatha*."

"I hope I shall never be too old for my friends to call me by my name," she replied. "Indeed, it has been quite a treat to hear it lately, for no one ever says *Agatha* to me now except my own relations. I am quite sick of 'Miss Hastings,' 'Miss Hastings' for ever."

"Why don't you call me Nigel, then, as all the folks here do?"

"I will certainly if you wish it, Nigel."

Mr. Lennox looked gratified. "That's like you!" he said. "You're aye ready to do what a body asks you." (Agatha could have laughed again at this, knowing herself to be particularly addicted to taking her own way.) "Do ye remember how the first time I saw ye, ye obeyed me when I told ye not to change your dress but come in straight to dinner? But I needna go any farther with ye now. Good-bye, Agatha, and thank you."

He stood holding her hand tightly for a few seconds as though he would have said something more ; then suddenly dropped it and turned away, while she continued her walk towards the Castle.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFIDENCES.

DURING the Laird's absence the Forsyths had arrived at the Knoll, having reached it by a different route from that which Miss Hastings had taken. The children, with youthful recklessness of fatigue, had rushed off at once to join in the games and to look, vainly of course, for their friend Daisy ; their father had good-naturedly offered his services to help swing the girls—a set of sturdy, round-cheeked, bashful little Scotchwomen, who struck him by their contrast with the sharp-featured, precocious young chatterboxes of his own school ; and Mrs. Forsyth, who was easily tired, had seated herself on a bench to rest after her walk, where she was presently joined by Mrs. Garden, who replied to her remark that she could not see Mr. Lennox with the information that he had gone off somewhere with Miss Hastings. “I hear that Margaret Cheyne got into trouble about something just before we arrived, and Miss Hastings has been trying to make peace : I would have let it alone had I been her ; that is a nice-like girl, but she gets made so much of here that a little setting-down would do her more good than

harm, even if not quite deserved," said the minister's wife, who, having no children of her own, generally advocated Spartan measures with other people's.

"Oh! I don't know about that," exclaimed kind-hearted Mrs. Forsyth; "I could not see the naughtiest child blamed unjustly without taking her part. I don't wonder at Miss Hastings at all. How nice she is, is she not, Mrs. Garden? She must be an invaluable parish worker—I only wish we had her at St. Dorcas's! But, indeed, she has been a great help already, in cheering us up about our work there—my husband had been feeling so discouraged lately."

"Ah! yes, he was telling the Doctor so the other day," said Mrs. Garden. Her manner was cut-and-dried and unsympathetic enough, but there was plenty of genuine kindness beneath it, and that her companion knew.

"Yes," she went on, "both he and I were beginning to fear that it was owing to something wanting on our part that we have effected so little, comparatively, for the good of our people—after nearly five years of prayer and effort we seem scarcely to have touched the great mass of depravity around us, and I know that in some cases we have done actual harm—when we thought we were relieving distress we were only encouraging hypocrisy and vice. Simeon had begun seriously to consider whether he ought not to resign his post, for he feels so keenly his responsibility, not only to the Great Head of Church but to dear Mr. Lennox, who gave him the living with such bright

anticipations of the influence he was to exercise in that dark corner of the great city—he almost felt as if he were deceiving him. But we have had some long talks with Miss Hastings lately about our difficulties that did us more good than yards of advice from any one who could not sympathise with us from experience as she can. It has made Mr. Forsyth feel quite braced up for the winter's work he was looking forward to with so much dread; and then she has told us of a new plan they have at Stockhampton for assisting the poor that seems to answer beautifully—we mean to try it when we go home. I only wish we could get her to come and start it herself—I should so like to introduce her to our curate; she would be just the wife I could desire for him. He's such a dear man, and not too young for her—just a suitable age; only he's so shy, I'm afraid he would never pluck up courage to come forward!"

"That's unfortunate," remarked the other lady, with just the suspicion of a smile lurking about the corners of her mouth.

"Sorry to interrupt your interesting crack, ladies!"—it was Nigel who spoke, he had come up to them unnoticed—"but I must ask Mrs. Garden to go and settle a dispute among the muckle lasses yonder; they're fallen oot anent something—whether it's a lad or what, I don't know, but I wouldn't meddle wi't mysel', for young queans are kittle cattle," he added with a chuckle. "Well, Mrs. Forsyth, and how are you?" he went on as the minister's wife departed for

the seat of war. "Glad you have managed to join us!"

"I could not have come but for Miss Hastings' kindness in relieving me of another engagement," she answered. "Dear Miss Hastings! I was just saying to Mrs. Garden what a *very* nice person she is. I believe she is a true Christian, Mr. Lennox."

"I have no doubt of that," rejoined Nigel emphatically.

"And a very earnest, humble-minded one, when you get to know her. We felt a little afraid at first, when we found out how clever she was, what her views might be, for these highly-cultured people take up strange opinions sometimes, don't they, Mr. Lennox? Even when they talk in a religious way one never knows quite what they believe—and one day Simeon ventured to speak seriously to her, just warning her, you know, of the danger of thinking more of intellectual gifts than spiritual ones, and saying how he hoped that in all her work and writings she would always put the One Thing Needful first. I was half afraid she would be offended; but, do you know, she took it so nicely; thanked my husband for his interest in her, and assured us that she felt exactly as we did on that point, and more so now than ever before, she said. And then she spoke as if she had come under some influence lately that had been a great blessing to her; she did not say exactly what it was, but Simeon and I thought it might have been something she heard at those meetings on the Christian Life they had in Stockhampton a little while ago."

"Very likely," said Mr. Lennox ; and then Trip and Eunice, who had caught sight of him from a distance, came running up to speak to him, or perhaps their mother might have proceeded to take council with him as to the feasibility of a union between Miss Hastings and the curate of St. Dorcas's.

Agatha herself had in the meantime reached the Castle, which she found preternaturally empty and silent, nearly all the servants being at the *fête*. After going all over the deserted mansion in search of Daisy, she at last discovered that young lady reposing on the cushioned window-seat of the Spanish Room, nursing her headache, but not in too much suffering to brighten at her uncle's message of reconciliation, and her friend's further announcement that she was going to sit with her for a while instead of returning to the Knoll.

"Will you write something in my album, please, Miss Hastings?" Daisy presently requested, taking up a book that lay beside her. "I was just amusing myself with it when you came in. By-and-by, I mean, when you are rested," for Agatha was reclining comfortably in Nigel's big carved arm-chair, which she had drawn up close to his niece's impromptu couch.

"Certainly, dear," she answered ; "I wonder what would please you most."

"Anything you like, Miss Hastings, except '*Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,*' for three people have written that already, and I'm quite tired of it. If I had been the girl in whose album Kingsley wrote it I should have thought it very unfair of him

to give me advice he didn't take himself. *He* wasn't satisfied to be only good!"

"He was 'clever' as well, I suppose you would say," rejoined Agatha; "and therefore all the better able to judge of the respective value of goodness or *heart*-power and cleverness or *brain*-power. The last is a noble gift of God, perhaps the grandest of natural gifts; and those who are blessed with it should treat it as a solemn responsibility; but we make a great mistake, Daisy, if we set our hearts on it, and a greater one still if we worship intellect in others when unaccompanied by goodness, moral worth, and Christian principle. And the longer I live the truer I believe it to be," she went on with emphasis, speaking as much to herself as to the young girl who lay with hungry eyes fixed upon her face, "that there is far less of real sublimity and poetry in the most splendid career of genius unlighted by faith than in the dullest, narrowest life that owns an unseen link with the Eternal Fountain of the Heavenly Beauty."

Agatha had probably got quite beyond her hearer's depth now, but Daisy's was one of those "heaven-taught minds" of whom Keble has sung who can "catch the sacred air and all the harmony unwind." "I like hearing Miss Hastings talk," she had said to her uncle one day, "even when I don't quite understand her. It is like reading a fairy-tale that I know has a beautiful meaning in it, only I haven't made it out yet;" and he had answered, "I ken weel what ye mean, lassie."

Agatha at last decided that the charming "dedication" of "The Woman's Kingdom," beginning—

"My little girl, sweet uncrowned queen
Of a fair kingdom, dim and far,"

should be her contribution to the album; and Daisy after reading the lines over carefully pronounced them "very nice indeed."

"Do you believe this, though, Miss Hastings?" she asked presently, "'Better to love than to be loved'; it must be so dreadful to have no one to love you!"

"It must be more dreadful still to love no one," said Agatha. "Don't you remember Burns's grace?—

"Some hae meat that canna eat,
And some can eat that want it."

I am sure the first are by far the most to be pitied."

Daisy looked thoughtful. "I was wondering if it means the one kind of love," she said; "*you* know, Miss Hastings."

"*You* seem to know at any rate, Daisy, whether I do or not," replied her friend laughing.

"Now don't make fun of me, please, dear Miss Hastings," entreated Daisy. "*You* never did before."

"No, dear, and I won't now," said Agatha, kissing her. "I beg your pardon. I am not so stupid as to suppose that you little maidens don't have your own thoughts on these subjects, or to blame you for entertaining them, as long as they are not foolish ones."

"That's just it!" rejoined Margaret vehemently. "I don't believe *I* think foolishly about it, but I hate

the way some of the girls at Miss Rettie's go on—mere children, no older than I am, to be always talking about *beaux*, and fancying they must flirt with every young fellow they meet! It makes me feel so disgusted. They can't know anything of what real love means or they wouldn't do it. Love is such a solemn thing!"

Miss Hastings sympathized too heartily with this speech to feel more than a passing inclination to smile at the incongruity between the very juvenile appearance of the speaker and the sentiments she uttered so sagely. "I quite agree with you, Daisy," she said. "I used to feel just the same at your age. Love is, as you say, a very solemn thing, and not a pastime for thoughtless young people."

"I wonder if it is true that everybody has been in love at some time or other of their lives," was Daisy's next remark. She looked upon Agatha as a sort of oracle.

"Not universally true, I am sure," was the answer.

"I thought so!" exclaimed the young lady triumphantly. "It was Robina that said it, but Robina doesn't know everything. Because there are some people who don't seem as if they ever *could* fall in love—Mr. Micklejohn for instance!" And Daisy, who had never heard of his proposal to her mother, laughed out at the bare idea.

Agatha smiled and made some assenting remark; but it was to Mr. Micklejohn's patron that her own thoughts had reverted. There was no doubt that Effie Gow had found him a faithful and affectionate lover

and husband, but that she or any other woman had been capable of arousing in him what is commonly called *une grande passion* she very much doubted. "No," she decided within herself as she walked home through the wood, after arranging with Daisy for a sketching excursion to the Birken Glen on the morrow. "His affections are so diffusive that one can hardly fancy them concentrated on a single individual. At least that is my idea ; of course I may be wrong, as I often am."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BY THE LIGHT OF A LANTERN.

(AGATHA'S DIARY—THE SAME EVENING.)

THE Argents were discussing their future plans at the dinner-table this evening, and it came upon me like a thunder-clap that we are to leave Crannoch on Tuesday next. Tuesday! and this is Thursday. I have been so absorbed in my enjoyment of the free healthy life I have been leading here that I had quite lost sight of the flight of time, and I suppose it is the suddenness of it that makes the prospect of parting so hard to face. Well, I have only my own stupidity to thank for the disappointment; but as Miss Procter says,—

“When you break your plaything yourself, dear,
Don't you cry for it all the same?”

When I was a little girl I used to fancy that it was only children who cried when their treats were over; but I don't think I shall find the ending of this happy holiday come any easier for being in my nine-and-thirtieth instead of in my ninth year. It makes me think of an incident in a story that I read long, long

ago—I don't think I was more than seven years old, but I remember still the feeling of melancholy it gave me. There had been a large family party at some lady's house, and when it was over her little boy was found in tears. "*What is the matter, dear?*" "*It has been such a happy day, mamma, and now it is gone!*" I have often thought of that story since, and to-night I could echo that little boy's words from my heart, though I have not begun to cry yet. Yes, it has been such a happy time, and now it is gone! . . .

I must tell my friends at Glen Irvine to-morrow. Oh! I do hope the day may be fine. Daisy will be sorry to wish me good-bye, I know, and I think Daisy's grandmother too; she has been particularly kind and affectionate lately—in her way; she is not a woman of many words. And Daisy's uncle—well, to him I cannot expect to be anything more than just a unit in the swarm of visitors who come summer by summer to Glen Irvine, and each and all share in his hospitality and his genial friendliness. Still I think I may say with Lucy in "*Villette*," that in that goodly mansion, his heart, there is a little chamber in the roof where Agatha Hastings may find entertainment if she chooses to call. But whether or no I ever see him again, I can never forget the example of Christian being and doing that he has shown me; I feel as if I should be a brighter and kinder woman my life long for having come in contact through all these weeks with that sunshiny, large-hearted nature. I thought of that yesterday when Mrs. Forsyth was telling me of some-

thing her little Silas said the night before. He was saying his evening prayers at her knee (she does not dictate them to him, but bids the child himself enumerate his little wants, his daily mercies); and after thanking God for all his country pleasures,—Mrs. Nimmo's cakes, the new milk, the pretty wild-flowers and berries, and I know not what besides,—he added, "*And Mr. Lennox.*" Dear little Silas! I too can thank God with all my heart for sending me such a Mr. Greatheart to help me forward on my pilgrim journey as Nigel Lennox has proved; sorely I needed the lesson he has taught me. As I write, my own words this afternoon come back to me in another bearing. If Christians, like their Master, are to be lights in the world, then they too should exhibit not merely the light of the lantern, but "the light from the crown of thorns," and that is just what I have failed to do—I see it plainly now. I have not been deficient in the first, the cold white light that detects evil; but of the other, the warm glow of love, I have known and shown too little. God helping me, I will be different in future; more tolerant of diversities of taste and temperament in those around me; more ready to enter into the interests of the Maple Bank people; more patient with my poor folks in Crook's Peak—after all, they are models compared with Mr. Forsyth's flock; more forbearing in general with the faults of others, and more severe to my own.

* * * * *

The Argents talk of spending a week or two at the

Bridge of Allan before they go home, and it is open to me either to accompany them there, to join the Langhornes at Dieppe, or to take up my solitary abode at Maple Bank till they return thither. I think I shall choose the first alternative; the Bridge of Allan is in Scotland, at any rate—and I have learnt to love Scotland.

The morrow's dawning gave promise of as fair a September day as heart could wish. "*He giveth us all things richly to enjoy,*" thought Agatha as she threw open her window to let in the fresh mountain air, and then strapped together her portfolio and camp-stool that she might lose no time in starting after breakfast. "Good-morning, Miss Hastings!" said Colonel Argent as she entered the breakfast-room. "Kitty will be down presently—she's not quite the thing this morning. She has got one of her fits of nervous depression on—nothing to be alarmed about, you know, but very trying while it lasts. May I entrust her to your kind care to-day—that is, if you have no special engagement? You see I had arranged to go to the moors with Lord Kintail and a party of his friends. Of course I would stay with Kitty if I could do her any good, poor girl, but I always think ladies can manage one another best at such times." And the Colonel as he stroked his moustache looked the very picture of helpless manhood.

Agatha only hoped that the blank disappointment

with which his words filled her did not show itself too plainly in her face. Happily Colonel Argent was not very observant, and when Miss Hastings, having sternly repressed the impulse to reply that she *had* a special engagement,—which indeed was true,—assured him that she would take good care of his wife, he was perfectly satisfied, and prepared to enjoy his day's sport with a clear conscience, while Agatha, after dispatching a short note to Daisy by the hand of a boy who passed the end of the lane on his way to the Glen Irvine School, set herself resolutely to the work of soothing and tending poor fanciful Kitty Argent. The task was no sinecure, for Kitty when suffering from "an attack on the nerves" was as unreasonable and capricious a little mortal as ever taxed the forbearance of long-suffering friends, and not so very long ago it would have seemed a much harder one to Agatha than it did to-day. She had been used to look with contempt upon morbid troubles as a good deal out of place in a world where there is so much real pain and woe; but she had learnt a new tenderness and pitifulness of late, and no mother could have been more gentle with the fretfulness of a sick child than was Miss Hastings with her troublesome charge, who spent the whole morning in tormenting herself with groundless fears; complaining of everything, but chiefly of "Rue's" absence, though had he been at home he would not have borne her "vapours," as he called them, with half Agatha's patience.

"That's the worst of shooting!" she sighed. "It

takes one's husband away for so many hours, and you can't go with him as you can when he's fishing."

Agatha gave it as her opinion that for two people who were constantly together a little separation might be an agreeable change now and then.

"Oh! you're not married, Miss Hastings, and you can't understand how a wife feels," replied Kitty loftily.

"If I was married nothing would make me feel happier than to know that my husband was enjoying himself, wherever he might be," said Agatha.

The young wife with all her childishness was in some respects more a woman of the world than her companion, and she could not resist a little sneer at what she thought an exceedingly "soft" speech. "That would be very convenient for some men!" she said, with a slight curl of her pretty red lips; to which Agatha rejoined, "I would marry no man whom I could not trust to the ends of the earth."

The bright morning hours dragged slowly along in the house,—Kitty refusing to be enticed out even for a short stroll,—but after lunch Agatha got a little respite; for Mrs. Argent having come upon a yellow-backed novel in some corner, retired with it to her room, saying she should perhaps read herself to sleep. Miss Hastings, who had peeped into the book, remarked that it appeared highly sensational, and more likely to keep her awake than to act as an anodyne; but Kitty did not heed the warning, only turning round to say as she left the room, "You won't go out, will you, Miss

Hastings? I don't want you to come disturbing me after I have lain down, but I shall like to feel that you are in the house." Agatha gave the required promise, and then, with the reflection that she ought not to grudge the sacrifice of some small proportion of her pleasure to the Argents, since but for them she would have known none of it, she got out her portfolio and worked up some of her sketches till the light began to wane. She was just wondering whether she ought not to go and see after her charge, when the object of her concern dragged herself into the room with a very white face, all puckered into lines and wrinkles of distress.

"And so you never thought of coming to see me!" she cried impatiently. "There I was all by myself, without a creature to speak to; and reading that horrid book has made me so dreadfully nervous. I wish I had never opened it! I saw you looking into it, Miss Hastings. Why didn't you tell me what it was like?"

"I told you it seemed very sensational," said Agatha.

"I never heard you," rejoined Kitty—which was perfectly true; people in her condition of mind rarely take in the sense of half the remarks that are addressed to them. "It's about a woman whose husband went out one morning to a hunt, and was brought back to her at night murdered. And she dreamed of it the night before, just as I did last night; at least, I dreamed that something dreadful happened to us,—I don't know what,—and I sha'n't be a bit surprised if Rue falls into a

loch to-day or over a precipice, or gets lost in a mist, or shoots himself by accident, and they bring him back to me dead or dying. Oh, Rue !”

“Nonsense, Kitty !” cried Agatha, and she proceeded to argue on the improbability of any of these contingencies, condescending so far to humour Mrs. Argent’s little weaknesses as to remind her how well the Colonel had looked as he strode off in his knickerbockers and heather-wool stockings. But all in vain. “I shall hate the sight of knickerbockers,” moaned Kitty plaintively, “if Rue gets killed in them.”

“Dear Kitty, can you not leave him in God’s hands ?” Agatha said at last.

“No ! I can’t,” was the almost defiant answer.

“What ! not trust Him to do what is best ?”

“Oh ! yes, I know that’s the way you religious people talk ; everything’s for your good, and it’s all for the best, you would say, if you were going to die the next minute. *I* couldn’t.”

“Don’t you think it is nice,” said Agatha gently, “to be able to feel that all the universe is our Father’s house, and that change and death only mean going to another room in it ?”

“A very dark room, that last !” said Mrs. Argent gloomily.

“It is not a room,” said Agatha, “only a passage, and that will not be dark when we are in it, for we know Who

“ ‘Stands brightly where the shade is
With the keys of Death and Hades.’ ”

But Kitty turned her head impatiently away. "Oh! don't preach to me, Miss Hastings. How can I attend to you when I am in such a state of anxiety? I don't want to hear a sermon just now; I want to be cheered and comforted. Dear! how gloomy the afternoon has turned. Whatever made us come to this wild, dismal place? I am sure I wish you had never agreed to join us—it was that that made us decide on it." An unjustifiable reproach which Agatha bore in silence, though she was not sufficiently cognisant of the symptoms of "nervous attacks" to know how utterly unreasonable they make their victims, even when these are persons of much stronger sense and clearer judgment than poor Kitty was at the best of times.

As the evening darkened round the Lodge the young wife's apprehensions increased; and when the dinner-hour arrived without bringing the absentee, even Miss Hastings began to feel slightly anxious, though she told herself, as she had told Mrs. Argent so many times that day, that there was really no ground for her fears, which she would scarcely acknowledge to herself, much less to her excited companion, who fidgeted about the drawing-room like an unquiet spirit, every now and then opening one of the windows and putting out her head in the hope of hearing Rue's approaching footsteps. Agatha at last suggested that the Colonel might have gone home to dinner with Lord Kintail. "Suppose you and I put on our ulsters and go up to the West Lodge and ask if the gentlemen have past through that way," she proposed. "If they have not,

we will get the woman to let her boy run on to the House and inquire if they have returned. The little walk would do us good."

"Don't ask me to go! If we were to meet them carrying Rue home it would kill me. You can go if you like,—I wish you would,—only please send Maria to sit with me while you are away; I can't be left alone. And do be as quick as ever you can!"

Agatha had rung the bell while the other was talking; she told the housemaid, who now came in answer to it, to get her the lantern which was always carried by any of the household who had to go abroad after nightfall, and then come to her mistress; then going into the hall for her ulster, she returned the next moment enveloped in it, with the hood over her head, gave Kitty a hasty kiss and admonition to cheer up, and disappeared. The night was dark and cloudy, and the wind howled fitfully through the tree-tops and blew with refreshing sharpness in her face as she closed the gate behind her and began to ascend the steep bit of lane leading to the highway. After her long day in the house she would have enjoyed the walk, but she could not help a slight feeling of eeriness creeping over her when she found herself in the lonely road with the black woods on either side and the scarcely less black sky above her, and thought of the solitary quarter of a mile that lay between her and the West Lodge. She stepped briskly along, lantern in hand, and was just calculating that she had got more than half-way, and that the next turn in the road would bring her

within sight of the light in the lodge window, when she suddenly became aware of a footstep behind her—a man's, evidently, from the tread, and quickly as she walked it gained upon her fast. Probably some labourer returning from his day's work to one of the handful of cottages that formed the hamlet of Crannoch, she said to herself, or perhaps one of the Crannoch House servants; yet she wished she was safe at her destination, and was thinking whether she should not hide the lantern beneath her cloak and retire under the hedge till he had passed, when a well-known voice cried out, "Stop! Agatha—Miss Hastings. The Colonel has come home."

"*You* here!" she exclaimed as Nigel Lennox came up with her.

"Why for no'? I'd been up the Ben wi' some of my visitors, and thought I would just come down this side and inquire for your friend, poor body,—I had a message for ye from Daisy forbye,—and at the door I met the Colonel, and learnt that ye had gone to speer after him; so I told them I wad try to catch ye up and prevent your going farther."

"It was rather too bad of them to send you!" said Agatha as they turned back together, Nigel carrying the lantern.

"Buff and nonsense! I wanted to see you, as I said just now. The lassie says she hopes ye'll be able to carry out your frustrated plans to-morrow, weather permitting; at any rate you might come and have a crack wi' mother—she was saying this morning

it's nearly a week since she'd set eyes on you. I have to go and open the new Public Hall at Strathquidder,—I hate that sort of gear!—but I'll see ye when I come back. Ye can stay and spend the evening with us, can't ye?"

"Thank you; I shall be very happy to come if Mrs. Argent can spare me," she replied. "I believe her nervous turns do not generally last more than a day. I was intending if it did not actually rain cats and dogs to come up to the Castle to-morrow and wish Mrs. Lennox good-bye." It was strange with what an amount of inward agitation she uttered this simple sentence, and what thought and trouble it had cost her to compose it.

"*Good-bye!*" exclaimed Mr. Lennox in a bewildered tone. "What are ye talkin' about? Ye're no gaun awa yet?"

"On Tuesday."

"Eh! what? Dinna tell me ye're aff on Tuesday! Are ye *obliged* to go?"

"Our time at Crannoch Lodge will be up then," said Agatha, trying hard to control her shaking voice, "and some other people, friends of Lord Kintail's I think, are to succeed us in a few days."

"I thought ye were going to stay the whole autumn," said Nigel with dismay. "Eh! Aggie, it'll be *Wae's me!* whan ye're awa."

He was only making fun, of course, she said to herself, and calling her *Aggie* was no doubt part of the joke. She tried to answer him in the same vein, but

words failed her, and she could only bring out something extremely commonplace.

"I should like very much to stay here longer ——"

"Wad ye? Wad ye really, Agatha?" cried her companion, too eager seemingly to let her finish her sentence, and stopping short suddenly in his walk he laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Wad ye bide here a'thegither, Aggie, and be leddy of Glen Irvine?"

Agatha was electrified. Could he possibly be in earnest? Was he really laying his great simple childlike heart at her feet?

"Agatha," he went on in a voice trembling with excitement, "I canna let ye gang awa wi'oot tellin' ye hoo I love ye. Of coorse I canna expeck ye'll be able to return it—I was a fule to speak as I did the noo—I ken better than to suppose that a clever, refined leddy like yersel could ever care for sic a rauch auld common chiel as I ken weel that I am; but I'll say this, that if ye *cud* bring yer mind to't, Aggie, there never was woman loved better than I would love you, than I *do* love you, dear. Noo dinna keep me in suspense, Agatha. Here we are at the turning; yon's your road doon to the Lodge, and here's mine; if ye can agree to what I've asked ye, tell me sae; and if ye canna, and it's mair likely that ye canna, say *Na* and gang your ways."

But Agatha neither said *Na* nor went her way. She stood motionless, unable to speak for very joy, and Nigel after waiting a few seconds in silence suddenly

lifted the lantern to the level of her face and saw that it was flushed with ecstasy and her eyes moist with happy tears.

"Aggie! Is it possible that you're willing to be my wife?"

And feeling himself as satisfactorily answered by the look she turned towards him as by her softly-spoken "Yes, Nigel," he set down the lantern on the ground, and still holding her with one hand, lifted his hat with the other, and said reverently, "For what I have received the Lord make me truly thankful!" And then Agatha felt herself clasped in his strong arms, while he murmured over her, "My ain Aggie! Mine at last! Wha wad have thocht it?"

Who indeed? Not Miss Hastings certainly. It was strange what a time it took her and Nigel to walk down that little strip of lane, and how much was said between the road and the gate of Crannoch Lodge. "I'll see ye the morn," her lover said, lingering after he had at last wished her good-bye. "But what am I thinkin' of, to be talking broad Scotch to ye just as if ye were a Hieland lassie? It's no' often that I let it oot so strong to my English friends—unless my heart's so full that I can't stop to cut and polish my words before I utter them."

"Then keep your English for your English friends, and talk Scotch to me, Nigel," said Agatha. "I must be a Scotchwoman myself now, you know."

Nigel was delighted. "I never meant to have gone about this business that gait though," he said. "In

fact, I never thocht I wad have dared to enter upon it at all. I came oot wi' *Aggie*, too, wi'oot thinkin'. Ye don't mind my callin' ye sae, do ye, dear?"

"I don't mind anything *you* say," was her answer; a very foolish one no doubt, but people generally are foolish at such times, and Agatha was even infatuated enough to stay between the gate and the porch listening to Nigel's footsteps and to the sound of his voice as he strode along singing,—

" Hunting tower is mine, Jeannie,
Hunting tower is mine, lassie,
Hunting tower and Blairin Gower,
And all that's mine is thine, lassie."

About quarter of a mile on his way he was overtaken by a brougham, the occupant of which, recognizing him by the light of the carriage lamp, pulled the check-string and called out, "Is it possible? The model of punctuality abroad at this hour! Get in and I'll set you down at the Castle, and save your character and the anxiety of your friends. I am on my way to the station," continued Lady Kintail, when he had availed himself of her invitation, "to meet a very dear old friend who is coming to me for a few days before she goes to India."

"Now that you've informed me of your own errand," said Nigel, "I suppose you feel entitled to ask,—

" 'Whither away, at close of day,
In thy best doublet, Simon Bray?'"

"Would that have been an appropriate question?" asked the countess archly, for something in his manner

told her that the quotation was not altogether a random shot.

"Very much so!" he answered, with a chuckle; and Lady Kintail, being, as the Scotch say, *gleg at the uptak*, required only a very little more explanation to make her fully cognisant of the state of affairs, upon which she offered her warmest congratulations.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAISY'S PRESENT.

IF Nigel and Agatha expected to electrify all their friends and acquaintances with the news of their engagement, they were very much mistaken, for with several of those who had been watching the course of affairs during the last few days it was already a foregone conclusion. The minister's wife had gone so far as to think over arrangements for the festivities which would of course take place in the village on the occasion of the wedding, and Lady Kintail, who though a countess was a woman of a frugal mind, had been wondering whether a certain rare old copy of Dante which she happened to possess, in an art-needlework cover of her own embroidering, the pattern of which she had already begun to draw out, would not do for a marriage-gift to the bride. Even languid little Mrs. Argent looked up at her husband and exclaimed, "There, Rue! Didn't I tell you that the old gentleman was smitten with Miss Hastings?" At which Rue stroked his moustache and rejoined, "Well, I suspected his concern about you this evening was not quite disinterested."

"It's very odd that old men generally want to marry

quite young women," remarked Kitty—a speech at which Agatha felt slightly indignant, since the disparity between the Colonel and his childish little wife was greater by a year than that between herself and Nigel, but she was too happy just then to feel angry long with any one, even with her sister for the letter of congratulation she wrote her on hearing the news. The whole family, Fanny assured her, were rejoicing in her good fortune, though they would all miss her from Maple Bank (Mrs. Langhorne could afford to be complimentary to her sister now that she was about to become Mrs. Nigel Lennox of Glen Irvine), and she herself considered that Agatha had shown excellent sense in accepting such a splendid offer. She had no doubt that Agatha would be extremely happy in her new sphere, and she felt sure that Mr. Lennox, with all his little peculiarities, would make an excellent husband ; but she advised her to take care and keep in with him, for she had heard that he could make it very hot for any one with whom he was put out. "Of course, my dear," continued the letter (it was a long time since Fanny had called her "my dear"), "you will have a great many little things to put up with, and you must not expect that Nigel will continue to find your erudite conversation as fascinating as he did at Stockhampton ; but you will no doubt be able to ride your intellectual hobbies with that comical old secretary, who will, I suppose, continue to form part of the establishment, since he and your *fiancé* seem as inseparable as the Siamese twins."

If this letter left a disagreeable taste in Agatha's mouth it was removed by one which she received from the writer's youngest son on the following day. "Dear Aunt Agatha," wrote Fox, "as I was out yesterday when the family congratulations were forwarded, I feel it incumbent on me to send mine in a separate parcel marked '*This side up. With care.*' Joking apart (you may imagine I can never be serious, but that I assure you is a popular error), I think you are the luckiest woman in the world, and my future uncle a splendid old fellow, the finest specimen of the *genus homo* I ever saw. I can vouch for this much, that since I came across him I have seen the reality of some things that I used to think all cant and talkee-talkee. I don't feel quite fit for a parson yet, but you know what I mean, Aunt Agatha, and it will be something to be an honest and Christian man of business, as I hope and intend to be, for you know Hasie is going to leave the Market Street grind, as he calls it, and get something in London, and I am to step into his place.

"What will your dear friends in Crook's Peak do without you? I have been thinking that if you like to keep on the room where you held your nocturnal assemblies, I wouldn't mind meeting the boys there once a week; if I could do nothing more I could play at games with them and make them laugh, which would be better for them than ninety-nine ways out of a hundred in which they might be employed if left to their own resources. I won't offer to meddle with the young ladies, lest they should all fall in love with me

and fight over me going home. But we can arrange all that when we meet. In the meantime I remain,

"Your affectionate nephew,

"FOXLEY LANGHORNE."

"Poor dear Foxie! Dear old boy!" said Agatha to herself, forgetting in a moment the hundred impertinences to which he had treated her, and she put away his missive in a secret pocket of her writing-case, along with Angelina Wiggins's and other treasured epistles.

It happened, as is often the case, that those who were most nearly interested in the step which Mr. Lennox had taken were the last to hear of it. His mother could not be told on the evening of the event, for having felt poorly all day, she had retired to rest earlier than usual, and her trusty attendant, Christian, who guarded her mistress's slumbers like a watchful dragon, and specially dreaded Nigel's by no means light footsteps, had issued a mandate that she was not to be disturbed. Jock Micklejohn had gone to some literary gathering at Aberdeen, and was not to return till the following day, and Daisy had been taking tea at the Manse with Trip and Eunice Forsyth, and finding her uncle engaged with some one when she came in, went straight to bed without wishing him good-night.

"Ye're to meet Miss Hastings at the Fairy Falls at ten o'clock," he said to her at breakfast the next morning. "See that ye're no' late."

"Do you think she'll come, uncle? It looks very much like rain; the Ben has got his nightcap on."

"Never mind that!" answered Mr. Lennox, and Margaret, to whom her uncle's will was always law, wondered and was silent. When she came down to the hall in her hat and ulster she was surprised to see him waiting for her, Glengarry in hand. "I'm going with ye," he said. "I've a new present for ye, and I'll just have time to show it ye before I go to Strathquidder."

"A present for me, Uncle Nigel? Oh! thank you. Am I to guess what it is?"

"Try if ye can," chuckled Nigel as they set off together; whereupon his niece hazarded sundry guesses, all of course very wide of the mark—her uncle making mental notes of some of them with a view to future gratification of the wishes they implied. "What wad ye say to a braw new Auntie?" he asked at length, just as they came in sight of the falls.

Daisy stared into his face for a moment in bewilderment; then catching a glimpse at once of his meaning and of Agatha approaching through the beech boughs, she exclaimed, "Oh! uncle, are you going to be married? Is it Miss Hastings?"

"Ay, it's Miss Hastings," answered Nigel, gleefully rubbing his hands. Daisy rushed off without another word, and the next moment was hanging round her friend's neck, and pouring out her joy in a torrent of mingled words and kisses. "And will you try and love me as much as you do your own niece, Blanche?" she asked as she at last unloosed her clasp.

"There won't be much difficulty about that, my Daisy," Agatha answered.

"Of course not, for you'll be her own niece then—when 'a' that's mine is thine, Aggie," struck in her uncle as he joined them.

"*You* here, Nigel!" exclaimed Agatha, with a look of glad surprise that sent a thrill of joy to his heart. "I thought you were going to Strathquidder."

"So I am, but I couldna win awa wi'oot a look o' my bonnie Aggie," he answered. "Daisy-chain, run ye home and ask if grandmamma is able to see Miss Hastings, but don't tell her anything—mind ye that! It won't be weather for the Birken Glen to-day, Aggie," he continued, as Daisy sped away and they followed her more slowly. "I think we'll only just get up to the Castle before the spate comes, but nae matter—ye can hae a crack with mother and tell her the news. I haven't seen her since I and you parted, for I found her asleep last night and left her asleep this morning. So you'll tell her, won't you, dear? She'll be gey glad to hear't, for you're a gran' favourite of hers."

Whether Agatha liked the task or no, she was not going to refuse the first request that Nigel had made to her since they had plighted troth. She answered demurely, "Very well," and went on to tell him that she had just had a letter from Lady Kintail. "Such a very kind one—it seems she met you last night," Agatha added with a smile, "and she asks me to come to Crannoch House for a few weeks."

"Noo I call that vera conseederate on her leddyship's part," was his comment. "Of coorse ye accepted?"

"What if I tell you I didn't?" she returned slyly—she was so happy that almost for the first time in her life she felt in a mood to tease; but Nigel only laughingly shook his stick at her and bade her not tell him "sic havers."

He parted from her at the Castle door, having made her promise that she would not leave it till his return; and she stood watching him drive off, listening to the sound of the wheels long after the carriage was out of sight, till Daisy tapped her on the arm and informed her that grandmamma was up and would be happy to see her, on hearing which Agatha went at once to her future mother-in-law's presence.

"Is there anything special going forward to-day?" inquired Mrs. Lennox after the first greetings had passed. "Margaret seemed so excited just now—just as if she had some secret she was afraid of letting out, and ye seem different yourself somehow from your usual."

"Dear Mrs. Lennox," said Agatha, drawing her chair close to the old lady's side, and taking her hand affectionately, "Nigel has asked me to tell you something."

The handsome old face lit up in a moment. "Eh! my dearie, has Nigel spoken then?"

"Did he tell you he was going to?" asked Agatha, perhaps a little disappointed that Nigel should have confided his hopes even to his mother.

"Never a word said he to me," answered the old lady, "but mothers have sharp eyes, and I could see

well what was in the lad's heart, God bless him ! And God bless you wi' His best blessings, my dear, dear lassie !" and she drew Agatha's head down upon her shoulder till the younger woman's dark locks rested against the elder one's silver braids. " Now my last wish is fulfilled, and right glad I am that you are to be the one to fulfil it, my own dear lassie—for you are but a lassie to me, you know. I'll be proud to call ye my daughter, and it's not every lady that comes here I'd say that to, though I'm no lady myself."

Agatha tried to answer, but her heart was too full for words. She left the talking to Mrs. Lennox, and leaning her head upon the old lady's shoulder, forgot that she was a middle-aged woman in the sweet restful sense of being once more enfolded in the brooding tenderness of a true motherly love.

Nigel was never in his life more glad to have done with a public ceremonial—always distasteful to him, and more especially so when it involved a speech on his part—than he was on that day, and it was with unmitigated relief that he found himself in the train *en route* for home, with the prospect of seeing Aggie in little more than an hour. The compartment he had entered had only one other occupant, an elderly gentleman in dark-green spectacles, who sat ensconced in a corner, intent upon the pages of a large book, which he held close to his face. So absorbed was he in its contents that even Nigel's bustling entrance and his loud hearty farewells to the Strathquidder notables

who had come to see him off had failed to attract his attention, and it was not till an involuntary touch on the part of his travelling companion made him look up with a start that he perceived Mr. Lennox standing in front of him, his stalwart frame shaking with merriment.

"Hoot awa! Nigel, is that yersel?"

"Ye auld dottled gowk! Have ye but found that oot noo, an' me stan'in glowerin' at ye for the last five meenits?" cried Nigel. "Pit awa yer buik, Jock, and hearken to me—I hae something to tell ye."

"Canna ye wait till we're oot o' the train?" asked Jock, somewhat unwillingly laying the book down upon his knee, with his finger between the leaves to mark the place. "I'm just upon a maist interesting topic."

"I'm upon a mair interesting one," returned Nigel. "Fat wad ye say, Jock, if I tell't ye that me and Miss Hastings had made it up thegither?"

"Nigel! Ye're jockin! Ye dinna mean it?"

"Dinna I?" rejoined his patron gleefully. "Why, Jockie, man, fat's wrong wi' ye?" for if Mr. Micklejohn had just received his death sentence his face could scarcely have become overclouded with deeper gloom.

"I'm seer I wish ye may be happy, Nigel," he roused himself to say, with a dismal effort at cheerfulness, "but weel—there——"

At this point Jock quite broke down, and his friend, thinking he had found the key to the enigma, exclaimed, "Eh! were ye wuntin' her yersel aiblins, Jock? Gin

I had kent that ye should have had a fair field ; she nicht hae preferred you to me—wha kens ?—if she cud hae chosen atween us. You wad be mair her equal in some respects than the like of me."

"Bless your true unselfish heart, Nigel ! Na, na, it's nae the leddy, I never gied her a thocht ; it's yersel, man, I'm wae aboot. To think that ye and me, after gangin' on thegither like brithers a' these years, and naether o' us ever thocht o' gettin' a wife——"

"Speak for yersel, Jock !" interposed Mr. Lennox. "Ye nichtna hae thocht o't, but ye dinna ken that I didna."

"Weel, weel," continued the secretary ; "we've been, as I said, like brithers. When I've read of David and Jonathan, and their love passing the love of women,—one o' them's was at any rate," and Jock's voice grew husky with emotion,—"I've aye thocht o' you and me, Nigel, and I never dooted but we wad just gang doon the hill thegither, and——"

"Hoot awa !" cried Nigel impatiently. "Tak' a wife for yersel, mon !"

"I dinna wunt ane," growled Jock. "As I was sayin'," he went on,—it was his habit always to finish a sentence, no matter how often it was interrupted,—
"I never dreamed of onybody, man or wumman, comin' atween us at this time of day."

"And wha has come atween us ?" demanded Nigel. "No' Aggie, I'm sure, unless ye will hae it sae. You and me hae aye been freens and aye will be, John

Micklejohn my jo. But I'll no argie wi' ye, ye're sic a camstairy loon." And Mr. Lennox turned to the window and looked out upon the landscape from which the clouds were now rolling away like a grey woollen coverlet. He smiled as he caught a glimpse of the Castle in the distance, and wondered whether Aggie was standing at one of the windows watching the train as it rounded the curve which would bring it under the shadow of the Blackden Hills. Thinking of her he quite forgot his companion, and did not even hear him muttering to himself, "Na, na, it canna be the same again—na, na."

Poor old Jock! He did not look at all sentimental as he sat there, with his hands on his knees (his book had slipped from them to the seat—he had lost all interest in it now), his long ungainly figure bent forward, his green spectacles pushed up over his nose, and his brows knitted in the ruefullest way; but he was far more truly to be compassionated than many a romantic maiden who sighs over the blighting of some passing fancy she is pleased to call love. Mr. Micklejohn had never in his life known the meaning of love, in that sense. He had desired to wed Jessie Lennox more on account of her relationship to his friend, and of her useful domestic qualities, than from any *tendresse* for herself, and he had been more offended than pained by her rejection of his advances. His attachment to Nigel had been the ruling passion of his life, a passion all the stronger and deeper for the narrow channel in which it flowed; and now Nigel had failed him! He

had let a woman—an English woman too, and Jock hated English women worse than Scotch women—supplant the friend of more than half a century in his affections; and the secretary felt himself a very ill-used being.

As for Nigel, it was not in him to understand his friend's grief, his own character being cast in such an utterly different mould from Jock's. He said to himself that Jockie was a queer auld fellow to look at the matter in that light; but that if he, Nigel, took no notice of his megrims, they would probably pass away the sooner, so he made no further remark to him on the subject, and merely said, "As ye like!" when Mr. Micklejohn announced his intention of walking from Blackden Station instead of sharing the carriage with his patron.

CHAPTER XXV.

JOCK'S COMFORTER.

“ I T’S ill to bear—ill, ill to bear ! ” sighed Jock as he left the high road and turned towards a wood, through which there was a footpath to Glen Irvine—it was not the nearest way, but it was the loneliest, and therefore he chose it. “ ‘To him that hath shall be given’—that’s true in mair senses than one ; the rich man, with exceeding many joys and pleasures, he’s to get still more ; and the puir tyke wi’ just the one friendship to keep his auld dried-up heart saft and warm, he maun een part wi’ that. It’s a’ richt, I suppose, but eh ! it’s hard.”

“ Oh ! well it is for ever,
Oh ! well for evermore,
My nest hung in no forest
Of all this death-doomed shore,”

sang a light-hearted maiden by the open window of a cottage near the entrance to the wood, while she fastened a smart flower on the new bonnet that was intended to fascinate Peter Begg, the big lad who always saw her home from the kirk on Sabbath evenings.

"We may weel say that," was the secretary's reflection, as the words caught his ear, "though it's little eneuch young lasses like you ken o' sic things. Weel, weel, I'll do no gude by fashin' mysel' about it. What does it matter after all, as Carlyle says, whether *I'm* happy or no?"

Thus philosophized Jock as he strode gloomily on, his head poking forward, his book under his arm, and his hands behind his back. Suddenly a touch on his shoulder, none of the gentlest, interrupted his cogitations, and something or somebody pushed uncereemoniously past him in the narrow path. He was about to utter a gruff protest against this rudeness when he discovered the offender to be a red cow, in charge of Daft Donald, who came shuffling along behind her, swinging his famous club.

"Hoo are ye, Mr. Micklejohn?" he inquired affably. "Ye've been awa ayont the hills, havena ye?"

Mr. Micklejohn was in no mood for conversation with Donald just then. He grunted out some reply, and accompanied it by the gift of a "bawbee," hoping thereby to get rid of its recipient, but he was not to be thus easily disposed of.

"Are ye no weel the day, Mr. Micklejohn?" he asked, peering curiously into the secretary's face.

"Weel eneuch," answered Jock shortly. "Gang on an' see to yer coo, there's a gude lad."

"She can see tae hersel'," replied Donald calmly. "She's as canny as you or me, is Rosie. Ye're luikin' dowie the day, I'm thinkin', Mr. Micklejohn!"

The secretary made no answer, and Donald, taking his silence for assent, went on, "Why dinna ye speer at Him wi' the booet to come and bide with ye? Ye ken Wha I mean, Mr. Micklejohn. He's gran' at cheerin' fowks whan they're lanesome."

"Fat made ye think I was lanesome, Donal?" asked Jock in a softened tone.

"Eh, I thocht ye luikit hadden-doon whan I saw ye daunerin' along yer lane," answered Donald. "I'm hadden-doon mysel' whiles," he continued with an air of experience, "but I juist tell *Him* about it, and syne I ken He'll mak a' richt. He'll dee the same for ye, Mr. Micklejohn, gin ye ask Him."

The other was silent for a minute or two. The *dour*, embittered look had been gradually clearing from his face while Donald spoke, and in its place had come an expression of gentleness and tenderness unusual to him even in his brightest times. "That's true, lad—that's gey true!" he said at length, "and if I had forgotten it, that shows I am a bigger fule than ye are yersel. Here's some mair bawbees till ye, laddie."

"Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he!" chuckled Donald. "That's fine, Mr. Micklejohn! I'll be as rich as Nigel Lennox sune."

"Ye wull be that, lad, whan ye gang whar He is that ye've been speykin' o', as nae doot ye will some day."

"And ye tae, Mr. Micklejohn!"

"God grant it, Donal!" returned the secretary solemnly, and Donald, well pleased with the success of his attempts at consolation, trudged off cheerily after

his *coo*, flourishing his club and singing, "Ance ane, and twice twa, an' Donal at the last."

"I've had a note from Jessie," Nigel said to his mother that evening after Agatha had gone.

"So I heard," remarked the old lady drily. "Christian says she got Mrs. Garden's Kate, who'd been to see her brother at Murkleton, to bring it in her pocket—the meanness of her! She's no' that hard-pressed that she canna afford a penny stamp, surely."

"Puir Jessie!" laughed Nigel good-naturedly. "Weel, weel, we a' hae oor weaknesses, and savin's hers. There's mair excuse for her than for many. She talks of coming for the day on Tuesday, and taking Daisy back with her. Miss Rettie's school reopens the week after, and she wants to have the bairn to herself for a few days first."

"She wants to make use of her too, I'm thinkin'," said Mrs. Lennox, "for Kate was telling Christian that Baubie had cut her wrist badly with the carving-knife. No' that it will do the lassie any harm; she's had more than enough of spoiling lately, between you and Miss Hastings."

"And her Granny," added Nigel slyly. "But anent Jessie—puir Jessie! she must have taken the advice I gave her last time I was there and bought new knives, for Baubie cud na hae dune hersel' muckle harm wi' ony o' thae auld blunt things that had been in the hoose ever since Rob's father's time. Hooever, I was going to say, I hope she won't hear the news about me and

Aggie till she comes here ; I'd like to be the first to tell her o't. Somehow I doubt she'll no' be ower weel pleased."

"Let *me* be the first to tell her !" said his mother imperatively. "Send her up to me as soon as she arrives ;" and Nigel, always ready to gratify her, promised to do so, though not quite able to read her motive.

Mrs. Cheyne arrived on Tuesday in happy ignorance of her brother's engagement, and she had no idea of what was coming when her mother said to her in a serious tone, "Jessie, I have something to communicate to ye."

"Weel, mother ?"

"Ye may na think it weel when ye've heard it," Mrs. Lennox went on, "but it's my wish and desire, if that has any weight with you, that ye'll say nae word to Nigel on the subject but what's ceevil and agreeable. Yer brother is going to marry Miss Hastings."

Jessie turned perfectly white for a moment. "The fule !" she muttered between her teeth. Then with a sudden change of manner she tossed her head, and said, with a snort of pretended indifference, "Oh ! ye needna fear, mother, that I'll say onything unbecoming to Nigel. He's my brother, and I dinna forget my duty to him, though he maena think he owes ony to me, a woman that's wrocht and toiled while he's been rollin' in——"

"Jessie ! Jessie ! I'll no sit here and hear ye miscall your brother. Ye dare not say that he has ever failed in his duty to you and yours, puir fellow !"

"Ou aye, ye hae peety for Nigel wi' a' his siller and hooses and land, but nane for me that's a pair overwrocht wumman and yer ain dother, forbye !" screamed Jessie, her Scotch growing broader as her wrath waxed stronger. "Ye aye thocht mair o' him than ye did of yer ain flesh and bluid—I ken that weel eneuch !"

"Jessie ! It's not for you to accuse your mother in that unjust fashion," answered the old lady with dignity. "I'll overlook what ye have said the noo, for I ken this has been a blow to ye ; but I wish ye showed a more Christian-like spirit, my dear," she went on in a gentler tone, "and that ye were na sae taen up wi' this warld's gear. There, there, it's a sair subject, and we'll say nae more aboot it at present, but mind ye what I said at the beginning, Jessie."

Mrs. Cheyne with all her faults was not an undutiful daughter, though in her temporary fit of irritation she had been both unjust and disrespectful. She bore her mother's injunction in mind, and congratulated Nigel when they next met with at any rate a fair show of cordiality, while she treated Agatha, when introduced to her in her character of sister-in-law to be, with a dry civility which Miss Hastings set down to Scotch undemonstrativeness and was not disposed to find fault with. But just now she went straight from her mother's room to the housekeeper's, and fell foul of Mrs. Elworthy for her failure in the watch she had engaged to keep over Nigel in the matter of his intercourse with marriageable ladies. Poor Mrs. Elworthy was feeling a good deal depressed already ; no single

gentleman's housekeeper, be she the most disinterested woman in the world, likes to hear that her master is about to take to himself a wife; and then she was humiliatingly conscious of the want of foresight she had displayed in her assurances to Mrs. Cheyne on a former occasion. So she listened meekly to her reproaches, and when they were spent endeavoured to mollify her by expressions of sympathy.

"Indeed, Mrs. Cheyne, I've been so busy lately that I've not had a thought to spare for anything but just my own duties, and I declare I was never so surprised in my life as when I heard what was coming to pass!"

"But whar were your eyes, woman?" demanded the aggrieved sister.

"I hope you'll believe me, ma'am, that it was not through indifference that I didn't notice what was going on; I assure you when I heard the news my first thought was of you. 'Poor Mrs. Cheyne!' I said to myself—'This *will* be a blow to her.'"

"Of course it's a blow to me," said Jessie, "to hear that my only brother has taken sic an important step without my ever having the chance to drop him a word of advice! And to think he hadna mair sense, with his grey hairs! than to be led into it by a summer-day's acquaintance like that. But men are a' fules in that respeck—a designing woman can mak' them do onything. Of coorse she willie-wha'd him into making her an offer. I'll wager ye onything ye like she doesna care a plack for ony part of him but his gold. What wad a blue-stockin' kin' of lass like that care for a

man like Nigel, that kens himsel' hoo uneducated he is ? And auld enuech to be her father too—the cutty !”

“ Let us hope that it will all turn out for the best, and that dear Mr. Lennox will meet with the happiness he deserves,” said the housekeeper soothingly.

“ Humph !” snorted Mrs. Cheyne. “ I dinna think *she'll* do much for his happiness. Thae authoress-bodies are just the maist uncanny, undomestic weemen in the world.”

“ I'm bound to say that Miss Hastings seems a very excellent young lady,” said Mrs. Elworthy. “ And then she's not such a very great authoress after all. She occupies herself with a great many other things besides books—useful and charitable things, I mean.”

“ Weel, weel ; I hope ye're staying on yerself, Mrs. Elworthy ?”

“ Mr. Lennox said to me in his kind way that he hoped I was not thinking of leaving,” answered the housekeeper. “ It won't be the same for me as it has been here, of course—that I can't deny,” she went on, wiping her eyes ; “ but still, if it is my dear master's wish, and for his comfort ——” Here she was interrupted by Daisy bursting into the room and exclaiming, “ Oh ! mamma, have you heard about Uncle Nigel and Miss Hastings ? I am so glad about it ! Won't it be delightful to have her for my own aunt ?”

“ So you think, I daresay, for you are but a bairn, and take a bairn's view of things,” answered her mother coldly.

“ And after all, dear Mrs. Cheyne, may not that be

the best view to take?" suggested Mrs. Elworthy, eager to throw oil on the troubled waters of poor Jessie's mind. "You know we are told that except we become as little children we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

"That statement was made in an altogether different connection," returned Mrs. Cheyne with thinly-veiled impatience. It always irritated her intensely to have Scripture quoted at her when she was in one of what Baubie called "*her terry-vees*." She had too much respect for the Bible to flout at its injunctions openly, as she would have done at the best intentioned human counsel, and she felt something in the condition of her countryman immortalized by Dean Ramsay, who could not receive a clerical visit with anything like becoming equanimity till he had time to "curse a while" at a small bodily hurt which had just befallen him. "You needna crawl sae croose!" she went on to her daughter. "It may na be so delightful as you think. Your uncle won't make of you now as he used to, that you'll soon see! And as for your fine auntie that is to be, I'll wager you a penny that when once she's leddy of Glen Irvine ye'll not be sae welcome at the Castle as ye are now. Na, na; when folks have gotten their point, they can afford to kick down the ladder they climbed up by!"

It is easy to embitter a child's cup of joy. All the brightness faded out of Daisy's face; her lip quivered, and she turned to the window to hide her gathering tears. Worse to her even than the thought of losing her uncle's love—that seemed too impossible to realize

—was the bare idea of having been deceived in the friend whom she had trusted so implicitly and raised to such a high pedestal in the temple of her young heart.

“Don’t look so sad, dear Miss Margaret,” said kind Mrs. Elworthy—she always addressed the child thus respectfully, though she was a good deal more of a lady, both inwardly and outwardly, than Daisy’s mother was. “I am sure your good uncle will never leave off loving his little Daisy.”

“Don’t ye ever mak’ sure of a man aboot anything, Mrs. Elworthy,” said Jessie. “If once he gets into a wumman’s pooer there’s naething but what she can mak’ him dee!”

Daisy went sorrowfully out of the room. Her lightness of heart was gone, nor did it return till experience had proved the falsity of her mother’s prognostications. If there was any difference between Agatha’s treatment of her pupil and of her niece it was one on the right side, for the great joy that had come to her had so widened and deepened her capacity for loving that she herself had even begun to hope that she might in time attain to the level of that exemplary little girl, often held up for her imitation in her nursery days, who “loved everybody.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE BIRKEN GLEN.

OCTOBER found Miss Hastings still a guest at Crannoch House, for Lady Kintail would not hear of her going away till the Langhornes returned to England. She found staying there very agreeable ; her hostess continued as charming as ever, or perhaps rather more so ; Lord Kintail, though quiet and reserved, was exceedingly kind and hospitable ; and the little ladies and their small brother, Lord Mauchlin, seemed to understand that she in some way belonged to their favourite Nigel Lennox, and made much of her accordingly. She was free, too, to come and go as she liked, which is not always the case in other people's houses, and her intercourse with Glen Irvine Castle and its master continued to be as unrestrained and frequent as either Nigel or herself could wish.

The weather had been very fitful and stormy during the last three weeks, and Agatha had come to despair of ever finishing a view she had begun in the Birken Glen, and which she meant to give to Nigel, when there came a soft, mild day such as October sometimes blesses us with ; a day not too scorching for a long walk nor

too chilly for sitting outdoors—the very day she wanted. She was at work early, Lady Kintail driving her to the mouth of the Glen, whence she walked to a coign of vantage which no artist seemed hitherto to have discovered—a little grassy platform a few feet below the path winding along the hillside above the ravine, from which she could get the whole length of it, with a peep of Loch Voir at the further end. She smiled to herself as she set up her little folding easel and took her seat in a sort of natural chair formed by the rock-escarpments cropping out from the braeside, thinking of the smile that would break out upon her lover's face when she should show him the finished picture ; she wondered if he would have it framed, and where he would place it. In the meantime he knew nothing about it ; she had playfully told him the evening before, when he had inquired her plans for the day, that he was not to ask, and he had appeared perfectly satisfied. Agatha was proud to think how implicitly he trusted her in everything ; not once had he questioned her about her past, or asked if she had ever loved another, and she was glad he had not, for she had grown too thoroughly ashamed of that episode in her life in which Clement Lascelles had figured to care to resuscitate it from the dead past, where it lay “unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.” Some day, she would say to herself, when she and Nigel were old married people, they might have a laugh over the story together, but just for the present it should continue in oblivion.

Looking around her she felt glad that she had been

prevented from coming a fortnight ago, when the birchen foliage had only changed to a pale amber ; now it had grown thin enough to let the snow-white stems, which the full leafage of summer had hidden, display their immaculate beauty, and its tint had deepened to a sort of dark orange, sober, indeed, compared to such a passionate blaze of colour as the beech-trees in the Castle grounds were taking on, and which, whenever she passed them, reminded Agatha of the words—

“ Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God ” ;

but having a certain chastened brightness befitting the lady of the woods, who never even in the heyday of her youth goes in flaunting attire, and which showed up well against the dark velvety green of the fir-woods above, and melted away in the far perspective into a dim fiery mist. It would make a perfect picture, and all through the pleasant morning hours Agatha laboured to reproduce it, undisturbed by any sounds save the songs of the birds, the occasional whirr of a pheasant, and the soft babbling of the tiny burn that wound along like a shining ribbon at the bottom of the glen ; and seeing no human being till about noon, when a gentleman—probably an artist, for he carried a portfolio under his arm—made himself visible at intervals as he threaded his way through the copse-wood on the opposite bank. Once or twice he stopped and looked across, she fancied

at her, and she wondered whether he was long-sighted enough to discover her occupation, and if he was making a note of the spot with a view to encamping there himself; but had almost forgotten the incident when some little time afterwards, just as having taken a short rest for lunch she was recommencing her work with fresh zest, a rustling among the bushes made her turn round, and she saw the stranger close beside her. No stranger either; the second glance told her that. It was Clement Lascelles who stood there, his appearance but little altered in the fifteen years that had elapsed since they had parted. The smooth, almost boyish face, only slightly bronzed by Tuscan suns; the hair artist-fashion allowed to grow long; the drooping moustache and dark melancholy eyes,—all were unchanged. Even his voice and manner were just what she recollected them of old as he held out his hand to her saying, "Is it not Miss Hastings? You remember me?"

Agatha wondered a little at the assurance with which he put the question, considering what she had to remember about him, but in the fulness of her present happiness she could afford to be magnanimous—even as a man who has just inherited a gold mine finds it easy to forgive a petty thief who once robbed him of a bad shilling. She responded with perfect composure to his greeting, only stopping to finish the streak of soft blue-grey she was just then putting in above Loch Voir to represent the brae up which

the boy Nigel had climbed the morning he left his home, before she gave him her hand. Her quondam lover had hardly expected her to show such indifference, for he had always thought with self-complacency of the *tendresse* she had once felt for him, and had cherished the delusion that she had kept single all these years for his sake, a delusion which was partially dispelled by the evident unconcern with which she went on to address some casual remarks to him. He would find some good subjects for his brush in the neighbourhood, she observed; there was a fine effect of wood and mountain to be had from an opening about a mile further along the path. She hoped secretly that he would at once take advantage of the information, but he seemed to have no intention of leaving her just yet; he looked over her sketch, and remarked that her touch was freer than it used to be, and then taking up his position against a jutting crag of red granite, he began to chat in an easy way on various subjects. Agatha remembered his leaning against the grey slate rocks of Snowdon in just the same graceful attitude.

She wished he would take himself off, for she grudged even the small amount of attention she felt it necessary to accord to his observations as so much taken from her precious work; but the stream of talk flowed on and on, till after touching on art and artists, on the English and Italian schools of painting, and on life in Florence and London, and having accidentally as it were let her know that he was now living in

the latter city, and a widower, he began to speak of his young daughter, Romola.

"She was born in Florence, so I called her Romola," he said. "She is a curious girl, different from other children. I should like her to know you."

"Have you got her with you now?" Agatha asked, looking up for the first time from her easel.

"No, poor little woman!" he answered, more sentimentally than fondly his listener thought. "She would have enjoyed it, I daresay, but one can't take a girl of thirteen on a pedestrian sketching-tour in an out-of-the-way region like this, where one has to put up at all sorts of primitive inns."

"Then why didn't you go to some place you could have taken her to, you selfish man?" thought Agatha.

"I have engaged an elderly lady to take charge of her and my house till I return," he continued. "It will be a question with me then what to do with the child—I can't keep her at home of course. A mother's loss is a terrible misfortune for a girl of her age" (here Mr. Lascelles sighed pathetically), "and the worst of it is there are no female relatives on either side to take an interest in her. I shall be glad if you will advise me about a school for *la poverina*, Miss Hastings—you used to be great on education, I remember."

"I shall be happy to give you any help in my power," said Agatha, more cordially than she had hitherto spoken; her heart was warming to motherless young Romola with her self-centred, *dilettante* father.

"She would be best at school, I daresay. I know of one or two near London where I think she would be well cared for and happy."

"Ah! I knew you would be the right person to come to," he rejoined, with a touch of heartiness that made her wonder whether she had misjudged him. "I have been wishing to meet you again ever since I returned to England, but did not know where to find you, till I was told by a gentleman whose acquaintance I have lately made in London—Algernon Maudsley—that you were living near Stockhampton, so I broke my journey there the other day and called at your sister's, where I learnt that you were in Scotland, and last night I found to my surprise that I was within a few miles of your quarters, and should probably have looked you up this afternoon if I had not come upon you thus opportunely. I saw a lady sketching from the other side of the glen, and guessed it might be yourself, as the event proved. Now tell me what I shall do with my little Florentine. I shall be so thankful to think she has a friend in you."

Agatha entered into the subject *con amore*, inquiring as to the girl's tastes and characteristics, promising to write to her, and giving her father further information regarding the schools to which she had alluded, for which he professed himself intensely grateful. "And I know a clergyman's widow at Croydon, a very nice woman, who takes pupils of the High School as boarders," she added, as he noted down in his pocket-book the addresses she had given him. "I believe in

High-School education where there is good home influence to supplement it."

"True, very true!" he rejoined. "The influence of home is, as you say, everything. I wish I had not to send her away from mine," and he sighed again. "I need not, Miss Hastings, if only——" he fixed his dark eyes upon her face, while his voice grew softer and more earnest—"If I might dare to ask you to come and fill the empty place there, and be to my child something more than a friend, a mother indeed. Is it quite impossible, Agatha?"

"Quite!" she answered dryly, rising at the same time to take a general survey of her picture. "I am willing to do anything I can for you daughter, but ——"

"But you will do nothing for me?" he interrupted. "Oh! Agatha, you will not say that! We loved each other once, though a cruel fate separated us." ("Not a cruel fate, but a kind Providence," Agatha could not help putting in.) "Indeed, Miss Hastings," and Mr. Lascelles made an appeal to his honour which his companion valued at just what it was worth,—“though no doubt you thought hardly of me at the time, it was because you did not know all; I was the plaything of circumstances,—but I have never forgotten what you were to me. I never cared for any woman as I did for you, Agatha; and now that I am free why may we not fulfil the dream of our youth? Nay, are we not young still? Artists and poets never grow old; and I call you a poetess, for there is true poetry in

some of your writings, though you may never have brought out a line of verse. Think again before you send me away!"

He had come quite close to her while he spoke, and laid his hand on her arm, to her no small annoyance. She would have shaken it off without ceremony, but part of her dress had got caught by one of the pins of the easel when she rose, and she feared a sudden movement would upset the whole concern and bring her picture to ruin—a catastrophe not to be risked on any account; so she could only wait impatiently till he came to a conclusion, which he did rather suddenly at last, a rustling sound close at hand, just as he came to the words "send me away," having caused him to start back from her and look around hastily, exclaiming, "What was that?"

"Probably a pheasant," said Agatha coolly. "If you had allowed me to speak before, Mr. Lascelles," she went on, "you need not have wasted so many words on me. Even if I had wished to give you the answer you desire, which most decidedly I do *not*, it is no longer in my power to do so."

"Do you mean that you are engaged to another man, Miss Hastings?" he questioned hastily.

"Yes, I am," she replied, with a sudden rush of colour into her cheeks.

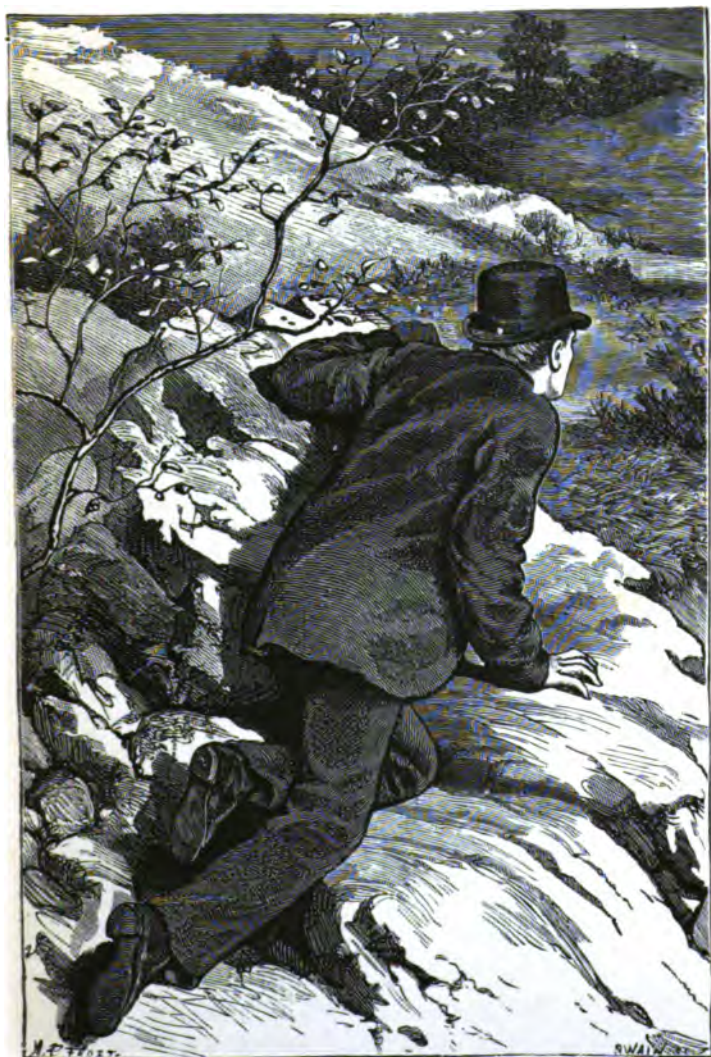
The artist's countenance fell; his game was played out, evidently, and without troubling himself to inquire who the other man might be, he wished her good-morning, took up his chattels, and departed. At his

inn that evening he gained some information respecting the laird of Glen Irvine's approaching marriage, which made him blame himself sharply for not having been sooner in the field ; if he had only gone straight off to Stockhampton when Maudsley first gave him Agatha's address, two or three months before, he might have forestalled this upstart—so he contemptuously styled Nigel Lennox in his thoughts. "Cursed be the gold that gilds the straitened forehead of a fool!" he muttered, as he stood at the door of the little hostelry, after finishing his chat with the landlord, thinking how conveniently Agatha's money would have come in for sending Romola to school and several other things ; for Mr. Lascelles had dissipated all his wife's property long ago, while the payment he received for his pictures was usually spent before it came in, so that in spite of his success as an artist he was no richer than when he first made Miss Hastings' acquaintance.

"I don't think the disappointment cut very deep!" she soliloquized as she settled down to her work again ; she meant to keep at it for another hour, which she hoped would complete it, all but the finishing touches she could put in at home, and then she would go up to the Castle and see Mrs. Lennox. "Is it possible that I, who thought myself and was accounted by others wiser than most young women of my age, could ever have made a hero of *that* man? 'O fond! O fool and blind!'"

The number of visitors at Glen Irvine Castle had

grown thinner with the declining year and the autumn storms ; a fresh party indeed was expected in a day or two, but just at present Nigel's only guests were a couple of gentlemen, who had started that morning on a three days' walking excursion among the mountains, and his nephew Will Cheyne, who appeared none the worse for his sojourn on the desolate western island of whose hardships his mother had complained so piteously. Will was a personable young fellow, handsomer and smarter altogether than his brother Mac, but by no means such a favourite with his uncle. Of all Jessie's children he was the one who most resembled her in character, and his indignation at Nigel's engagement had been only second to hers, though he was too politic to let any suspicion of it appear while he was at the Castle. He was leaving for Murkleton that same afternoon, and had spent the morning with his gun on one of his uncle's moors, from which he returned by the Birken Glen, taking the very path just below which Agatha was at work. He could not see her as he passed, but catching the sound of voices, one of which he recognized as hers, his curiosity was aroused, and he scrambled far enough down the wooded bank to find out (as he believed) that his uncle's *fiancée* was lending an attentive ear to an impassioned declaration of love from a stranger, and even allowing him to hold her hand. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" thought the young gentleman, trembling with excitement. He tried to get nearer to them, but in doing so made, in spite of his caution, a rustling noise—the same which



WILL SCRAMBLED DOWN THE BANK.

[Page 310.]

had startled Lascelles, and Will on hearing his exclamation thought it prudent to creep cannily back to the path. He chuckled knowingly to himself as he strode on, not at all ill-pleased by the discovery he had made. What a piece of good fortune it was, to be sure, that he had happened to pass just at that moment ! There would be an end surely to his uncle's matrimonial intentions now that his fair lady had been caught trysting with another on his very domain ; for that she had met her admirer there by appointment young Cheyne did not doubt, remembering that he had overheard her the night before laughingly refuse to disclose her plans for the day to Nigel. " Uncle will be mad about it at first, but it'll be a lucky thing for the rest of us, if I'm not mistaken," he decided, as he passed into the Castle grounds ; and he whistled a cheerful tune as he drew near the house, softly, however, lest his uncle should be within hearing ; it would never do to appear exultant before *him*.

He found Mr. Lennox in the Spanish Room, engaged in tearing up old letters and throwing them into the small wood fire which burned in the large open chimney. He greeted his nephew with his usual cheery smile.

" Weel, lad, what sport ? "

" Pretty fair, thank you, uncle."

" Made a gude bag to tak' hame with ye, eh ? That's right ! Are ye no' hungry ? I bade them leave the lunch in the dining-room in case ye didna find what ye took with ye sufficient."

" I don't want anything more, thank you, uncle,"

Will answered, with some little awkwardness of manner—coarse-grained as he was, he could not help quailing a little at the thought of the stab he was about to inflict on this trustful, generous nature. He sat down, pushing back his chair so as to be out of the direct line of his uncle's eye, and said, "It's nearly time for me to be off, but I feel it's only the right thing to let you know of a little scene that I was witness to in the Birken Glen just now."

"Weel?"

"Well, I heard some philandering under the trees as I was coming along, which naturally excited my curiosity, and what should it turn out to be but a love-scene between a sentimental-looking, long-haired fellow—an artist, I fancy, from the glimpse I caught of him—and—hm—m—Miss Hastings. You knew she was going to the Birken Glen to-day, didn't you, uncle?" (Will was pretty sure that his uncle did not know anything of the kind, and wished to remind him of that.) "It was as good as a page out of a novel to hear him holding forth to her, with her hand in his all the time. It seems that they were lovers in their youth,—though he looks quite young now,—and somehow got separated and lost sight of each other; and he has only just found her out again, and is wild to renew their old relations. I only stayed a minute or two, so I don't know what followed; I left them at it. It's not a pleasant thing to tell you," Will concluded, "but I didn't think I ought to go away without doing so."

"No, of course not," Mr. Lennox answered in a

mechanical voice, without looking up from his occupation. Will was astounded at his seeming coolness. He had expected an explosion ; but beyond a hasty look round when Agatha's name was first mentioned, his uncle had appeared but little affected by the disclosure he had made. " Are ye going noo ? " he asked, as the young man rose. " Weel, good-bye, lad ; a pleasant journey to Glasgow to ye next week. My love to them all at home. Oh ! and there's a number of the *Farmer* lying on the library table that I want ye to take to yer father—he'll see mention in it of a prize won by a young shorthorn, brother to that last one I gave him. Dinna forget to point it oot to him."

" Takes it much easier than I fancied he would ! " thought Will, as he drove away in the dog-cart. " He can't have been so daft about her, after all, as we imagined. Perhaps he's not sorry to be off his bargain—I can't think what he saw in her to begin with, I'm sure." He never knew how the tidings he had brought had burnt into his uncle's heart, nor how long Nigel sat motionless after he had gone away, with his face bent forward upon his hands.

In Eastern romances we are sometimes told of a humourously-inclined despot ordering some humble son of toil among his subjects to be conveyed in his sleep to the palace, clad in the royal robes, and greeted as a king on his awaking. The simple fellow thinks at first it must be an illusion—it is altogether too good to be true ; but gradually he grows accustomed to his imperial state, and settles into the comfortable belief

that a king he is and always will be, sinking to rest at night in the full consciousness of royalty—to waken, poor simpleton! among his old homely surroundings, and find that after all his kingship *was* too good to be true. Have we not known such experiences in our dreams, when some delicious, unhopèd-for joy has come to us, and we keep assuring ourselves that it is quite real, not an illusion at all, till the waking comes, and we find that after all things are just as they were before?

So it had been with Nigel Lennox. At first Agatha's love for him had seemed too good to believe in; then he had grown gradually accustomed to it; but now a rude hand had awakened him out of his happy dream, and he muttered to himself, "Ay, ay, I micht hae kent that it coudna be;" then his eye falling on a newspaper which lay on the floor beside him, he tore a large piece from it corner-wise, crumpled it up in his hand, and flung it upon the fire. It was the latest number of the county journal which he thus mutilated, and the burnt portion had contained a ballad which some correspondent had unearthed from an old magazine—so he said; possibly he had composed it himself, and sent it to the editor as being appropriate to current events.

The lines—they were simple enough—were called

THE THISTLE AND THE ROSE.

There dwelt a thistle on yonder lea,
And a rare auld lordly carle was he.

Prood was his heid, and prickly his skin,
But eh! he was geyan sweet within.

There came a red rose oot o' the South,
And he longed for a kiss of her bonny mouth.
The floers o' the braeside, one and all,—
The yellow broom and the foxglove tall,
And the heath-bell red, and the heather-bell * blue—
Ilk ane wad hae let him pree her moo.
But the braeside floers were no' to his mind;
It was aye for the red, red rose he pined;
And he has ta'en her by the hand,
And led her oot at his side to stand.
"The end o' the summer's near," said he,
"And syne ye'll awa to yer ain countree.
"Gin I wad, I daurna bid ye stay,
But there's juist ae boon I crave to-day.
"Grant me a kiss of yer bonny mouth,
And then gang awa to yer ain sweet South."
The red rose answered him true and bold
Out of the depths of her heart of gold,
"I will not kiss you and go away,
But if you bid me," she said, "I'll stay."
So the red rose was the thistle's bride,
And bloomed on the mountain at his side.

This production had taken Nigel's fancy mightily when he read it first that morning at the breakfast-table, and he had gone over it more than once since; but it seemed only a hollow mockery now, and he watched it consume with a sort of grim satisfaction. Then he rose and went to the window and stood for a while looking out towards the sunlit mountain-tops and the golden mistinesses of the Birken Glen, and

* Harebell.

thinking how, only two days before, he had stood at that very oriel and surveyed that same landscape with Agatha at his side. *Then* he felt light of heart and buoyant as any stripling in the morning of life ; now he seemed to have turned suddenly old and grave, touched by the wand of the grim magician Disappointment. Yet there was no wrath or bitterness in his countenance as he gazed up to the fair October sky ; rather might it have been said of him, as of one of old, that—

“ Looking upwards full of grace
He prayed, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.”

He threw open the lattice and let the soft breezes play about his heated brow ; then turned away, and murmuring, “ *In the Lord's ain howff, at the lang last,*” as he glanced up at the inscription over the mantel-piece, he went to seek the sympathy of the one true heart, whose faithful love had never failed him for more than half a century.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WILL'S NEWS.

MRS. LENNOX, sitting in her chair by the window, heard her son's footstep ascending the stairs and wondered what made it so slow and heavy, so different from his usual brisk, energetic tread. "Eh! my dear lad, what is it?" she asked, as soon as she caught sight of his downcast face.

He crossed the room and sat down beside her; then taking her hand in his, he bent his grey head over it as he answered, "Eh, mother, God has asked a hard thing of me."

"Is aught wrong wi' Aggie?" exclaimed the old lady.

"Not wrong, mother; but she'll never be Leddy of Glen Irvine now;" and then he told her what he had heard from Will, whereupon she gave it as her opinion that he had been too hasty in giving such full credence to the story.

"He's likely made a mistake," she said. "Don't make up your mind that all's lost till you've spoken to herself. Did ye cross-question him about it?"

"Na, I didna," he answered sorrowfully. "I just hadna the heart to say a word on the subject."

"And ye let him go home to spread the news after his own fashion? Will was aye a braw hand at tellin' a tale!" she rejoined impatiently. "Weel, I thought ye had mair gumption, lad! But dinna luik sae hadden-doon, dear," she went on more tenderly—indeed, the querulous tone she had adopted had been partly put on to divert him from his grief. "Why don't ye go and find Aggie, and hear her version o't?"

"Hoots! mother, I see it all as plain as daylight. Aggie's no' for me. It was vera weel for her to think she could mak' hersel' happy wi' me, while she believed that the lad she ance loved was clean lost to her,—she has likely thocht him deid or marriet to another,—but noo he's come back free to claim her for his ain, do ye think she would be content to let him gang his way? An artist too; the like of that wad be a deal mair befitting to her than an auld rauch carle wi' naething to recommend him to a leddy but a few handfuls of yellow dross."

Mrs. Lennox gave a grunt of dissent. "But Aggie's troth-plight to you, Nigel," she said. "It's not for her to listen to yon—to the other one—till you give her leave."

Nigel's eyes flashed, and he drew himself up proudly. "I'll soon set her free frae that bond!" he said. "I'm no' gaun to act Auld Robin Gray, I can tell ye, mother. She shall marry the man she loves,—my bonnie Aggie!—and nane shall let or hinder. Thank God I have *you* left, mither!" and he threw his arms

round the old lady's neck and kissed her. Then turning towards the window, he said, "I believe I see her coming up through the glen. She'll be on her way herè, I'm thinking. I'll e'en go and meet her, and let her ken that I'll no stand in the way of her happiness—I can do it without expressly alluding to what I've heard. I doot she'll be fashin' herself as to how she's to get oot o't wi' me ; she's no' be lang in suspense. Speak douce and kind to her, mother, if she comes up to see you ; dinna reproach her. If she's happy, I'm happy—my bonnie Aggie!"

"Very well," rejoined Mrs. Lennox, muttering to herself as he left the room the proverb, "He that will to Coupar maun to Coupar."

He met Agatha a little way beyond the gate through which Will had passed with his burden of evil tidings only an hour before, and turned back with her,—she was intending, as he had conjectured, to pay a visit to his mother,—but it seemed impossible for him to bring out a word of the speech he had been framing, and he walked by her side in silence. Agatha felt sorely puzzled. His constrained greeting, and the monosyllabic answers he gave to her remarks, told her something was wrong, and a nameless fear stole over her. Then she remembered having heard that he suffered occasionally from fits of depression ; probably this was one of them, and she was wondering whether it would be better for her to try to dispel it or to let it pass unnoticed, when they reached the gate, which he opened for her, but did not follow her through.

"Are you not coming any farther?" she asked, as he shut it behind her.

"Not to-day," he said. "Our ways have lain together so far, but it is best for us to part here. I've just one word to say to ye, Aggie, and then ye can go on and see mother. I've been an auld fule, Aggie, ever to think of makin' ye my wife," he went on huskily. "You've been vera gude to me, and I thank you, as I've thanked God every day, for the happiness of this last month, but I made a grand mistak', and—weel, I wish ye every happiness and every blessing, and ye're free to forget auld Nigel as sune as ye like. There, never mind saying anything"—as her white and trembling lips tried to frame a question. "I know what your kind heart would dictate, but there's no need for't; we understand each other. Just gang up and hae a crack wi' the auld leddy, and remember that you and yours will aye be welcome at the Castle. Good-bye, God bless you, dear!" and leaning across the gate he drew her towards him and tenderly kissed her forehead; then hastily turning away, disappeared among the trees.

Agatha's brain seemed to be reeling; she turned sick and giddy, and leaned against the gate for support. Once she called after him faintly, but he was already too far off to hear her; the sound of his footsteps was dying away in the distance. She gathered herself up with an effort, and mechanically took her way towards the Castle, tortured by all sorts of terrible possibilities which might account for his thus casting her off; for

the idea of connecting his words with what had just occurred in the Birken Glen never entered her mind. Surely he must have discovered some insurmountable obstacle to their marriage. Could it be that he had a wife already, wedded perhaps in secret soon after he lost Effie, and hitherto supposed dead? But Mrs. Lennox would know; Mrs. Lennox would be able to solve this frightful enigma; and at this thought Agatha at once quickened her steps, nor stopped to draw breath till she found herself in the old lady's presence.

Nigel in the meantime had gone far into the depths of the forest; not, however, to brood over his disappointment in solitude—he was not the man to “sell his heart to idle moans,” nor to think he had found an excuse for neglecting even the most ordinary duties of his life's day because its sunlight had vanished and its sky had been overcast. He had just remembered having fancied the day before that a certain rustic wooden bridge spanning one of the many little streams—all tributaries of the Irvine Burn—that flowed through his woods felt shaky as he crossed it, and he wished to examine it; he hated rotten work as he did “lees,” and much of his success as a builder was owing to the solid and durable character of every structure erected by the firm, whether it were a palace or a cottage. Having satisfied himself that all was right and tight, and that consequently there was no need to put a rod in pickle for the village carpenter whose handiwork it was, he returned homewards by another route, and was about half-way through the grounds when he was met by

a man-servant, who informed him that Mrs. Lennox was wanting him, and had sent everywhere to look for him.

Nigel quickened his pace, but he would not allow himself to hope for good tidings. He feared that his mother in her great love for him had been working upon Agatha to throw over her old sweetheart for his sake, and that he would have to do the work of renunciation over again. So his step was not much lighter than it had been two hours before as he once more climbed the staircase of the south-west tower. He paused for a moment outside his mother's door ; it stood ajar, and the conclusion of a sentence spoken by Agatha's voice caught his ear,—“not the smallest piece of my heart left to give him ; much more now when it is all and entirely Nigel's.”

“Eh, Aggie ! Is that true ?” he cried, flinging wide the door and bursting into the room in a tumult of joy. Agatha sprang to his side, and he caught her in his arms with a deep emphatic, “Thank God !” while Mrs. Lennox exclaimed, “You auld gowk, Nigel ! Didna I tell ye that a word with Aggie would set all straight, and ye wouldna believe me, but must needs go and nearly break her heart, making her think you wanted to be quit of her !”

“Aggie ! Ye never thought that ?”

“Of course she did though !” replied his mother, with a warning look to Agatha to say nothing. “What else could the poor lassie think ? It wad serve ye right if she took ye at your word and married yon artist, only as she doesn't care a bawbee for him it would be

punishing her as well as you, and she's gone through enough already without that. Ye might see for yourself how ill she's looking. There, take her awa with ye, and let her tell ye all about it; and make of her well after the fright ye've given her,"—an order which Nigel was not slow to obey, especially the last part of it.

"And sae ye loved auld Nigel better than the artist-chiel after all, Aggie?" he said, when they were alone together in the Spanish Room.

"It was not a case of loving *better*, Nigel," Agatha replied; "for I neither like nor love the artist-chiel, as you call him—and it is quite as complimentary a designation as he deserves—in the smallest degree."

"Eh, ye've no great opinion of him then? I was going to say I wad buy some of his pictures just to console him a little for his disappointment, but I'll hear your account of him first."

So Agatha told him all that there was to tell about Clement Lascelles, ending with, "But I am really sorry for his poor little girl. I should like to befriend her if I can."

"So should I like ye to, dear," answered her lover. "Ye shall ask her to come and see us when ye're leddy of Glen Irvine, and that maun be sune noo, Aggie my woman. I canna dee wantin' ye much longer."

"Oh! nonsense, Nigel."

" ' There's nae luck about the house,
There's nae luck ava,
There's little pleasure in the house
While my gude deem's awa ! ' "

sang Nigel by way of reply. "Nonsense here and nonsense there! I maun mak' sure o' ye, or wha kens but ye'll be for rinnin' awa wi' anither artist, and I wunna bid ye gang wi' him the next time, I can tell ye. Ye'll e'en hae to sing"—and he began to chant in a doleful tone of mock resignation—

“ ‘ I'll dee my best a gude wife to be,
For auld Robin Gray is vera fond of me. ’ ”

Could Mr. William Cheyne have seen and heard what was passing at his uncle's just then, his step would scarcely have been so elate nor his smile so complacent as he strode through the little knot of people hanging about the Murkleton Station, flinging a careless nod to some old acquaintances among them. "Willie Cheyne aye luiks as prood as a bubbly-jock whan he comes back from Glen Irvine," remarked young Andrew Peddie, the driver of the Kintail Arms 'bus, to Murdoch Bain, the sutor's* son, who like himself had been the said Willie's playmate and schoolfellow in bygone days; but the subject of the loudly-spoken observation was already out of hearing, in such haste was he to communicate his welcome intelligence to the home circle at the Mains. He found his parents and Daisy just sitting down to tea. "Well, mother, what'll ye give for me my news?" he asked cheerfully, as he took his seat at the table.

"I'll tell ye that when I've heard it," answered Jessie, with her accustomed pawkiness. "Come, oot wi't! I'm nae han' at guessin'."

* Shoemaker.

So Will told his story, amid such breathless silence on the part of his hearers that the hard breathing of Baubie, who had caught the word "news" as she passed the parlour-door and lingered outside to listen, might have been heard through the keyhole.

Daisy's eyes grew large and sorrowful as he proceeded, while her food lay untasted on her plate; and her father raised his eyebrows, but ventured on no remark more significant than an occasional "Hoot awa!" or "Weel I wat!" Mrs. Cheyne greedily devoured every word that fell from her son's lips, and when he had ended, lifted her hands and eyes and ejaculated solemnly, "Weel—weel! the ways of Providence are wunnerful. To think how set up yer uncle was aboot his weddin' and his braw English leddy, and syne for a' to gang aoley at the eleventh hoor. Weel, weel! There's mony a slip between the cup and the lip."

"A lucky slip, I doubt, for some folks," chuckled Will complacently, "and I daresay Uncle Nigel will feel it so for himself in the end. He didn't seem so cut up about it as I expected; I thought he'd have kicked up an awful shine."

"Deed, an he may be thankful to be weel rid o' her!" snorted Jessie. "Sic a wife as she wad have made him! It's a gude thing this happened afore they were marriet. Aweel, I hope this will be the end of his fine young leddies. At his time of life it wad be mair becomin' in him to be preparing for another world. Robbie, man,"—Jessie's triumph had made her unusually

affectionate,—“did ye post my letter to Janet whan ye were in the toon?”

A look of dismay came over Robert's face, as feeling in his pocket he discovered the letter still there, and drew it forth with the shame-faced confession that he had “clean forgotten it.”

“That was like ye!” returned his better half. “But I'm not sorry noo; I'll e'en open it again and tell her what we've heard.”

Rob ventured mildly to suggest that it might be better to wait till they could give a completer account of the affair; but her gudeman's objecting to the course she intended to pursue was sufficient of itself to convince Mrs. Cheyne that it was the right one, so she merely replied with a contemptuous snort, “Hoots! I ken what I'm aboot. The suner she learns that her uncle's no' gaun to make a fule o' himsel in his auld age after a', the better,” and proceeded, after opening the letter by means of the steam of the tea-kettle, to add a post-script to it, as follows:—

“There has been a fine stramash* at Glen Irvine. Will is just home from the Castle; he was in the Birken Glen this morning, and there he caught your fine auntie that was to be, trysting with a young man—an artist, or something of the kind, and I don't know what all sugary-fackery† going on between them. Of course Will went straight and told his uncle, who took it, he says, very sensibly. What steps he took, or what my lady had to say for herself, I can't tell; but,

* Row, upset.

† Secret talk, or intrigue.

humanly speaking, it looks as if there were to be no wedding at Glen Irvine yet awhile. Your uncle will have had enough of young leddies noo, it's to be hoped. However, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and I certainly see the hand of Providence in this dispensation, in averting from us what we naturally looked forward to with mistrust. It's a mercy that your brother made the discovery in time ; there's no saying what sort of a double game she might have played, for there's proof positive that she met the fellow *by appointment*—the sly cat ! No more at present ; I'll write you again as soon as we get further particulars."

Having finished this labour of love, Jessie looked round and asked where Daisy was, as she had some mending for her to do.

"I'm thinkin' she's awa upstairs," answered Mr. Cheyne, who had seen her leave the room a little while before with downcast eyes and quivering lip, and had guessed that she had gone to indulge her grief in secret. "I'll go and luik for her if ye like," he volunteered, knowing how untender would be her mother's handling of the sore point. A faint sound of distress coming from Daisy's little room guided him to her as he ascended the stairs ; he pushed open the door, which she had unwittingly left ajar, and found her kneeling by her bedside in the moonlight, the tears streaming over her clasped hands. "Eh, my dearie, fat's wrang wi' ye the nicht ?" he asked tenderly.

"Oh ! papa," she exclaimed, as she rose from her knees and crept into the kind arms that were opened

to receive her, "I'm *that* sorry for Uncle Nigel! I know he must be just heartbroken about losing Miss Hastings, though he wouldn't like to let Will see it; he was so awfully fond of her. I was just asking God to comfort him," and Daisy's eyes overflowed afresh; in her faithful little breast pity for her uncle had completely overpowered the pain to herself caused by the shattering of her idol.

"My *puir* lassie!" said Robert, kissing her pale cheek. "I'm wae for Uncle Nigel mysel'—only we mustna say so before your mother—she feels differently, ye see. There, there, *dinna* greet ony mair, my doo; dry your een and rin doonstairs. Ye have done the vera best thing ye cud; and God, that Uncle Nigel serves, will comfort him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOCK DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

“**S**AE that was the end of Aggie’s tryst.”

Thus Nigel wound up the narrative of the day’s events with which he favoured Mr. Micklejohn when they were alone together in the evening; and Jock had by this time so far recovered from his soreness at his friend’s projected marriage as to be able to congratulate him heartily and sincerely that the said end had been such a happy one. “But do ye mean to say ye let Will Cheyne gang hame to tell the story his ain gait?” he inquired.

“Weel, I did,” answered Mr. Lennox. “I was that hadden-doon wi’ the ill news he brought me that I had nae hert nor speerit to think o’ onything. I must write to him and explain.”

“It’s ower late to sen’ a letter to-night,” said Jock. “How wad it be for me to go over to Murkleton in the morning and tell them a’ about it?”

To which suggestion Nigel assented, to the great delight of his secretary, who secretly rejoiced in the thought of the discomfiture his tidings would inflict on his former sweetheart; indeed, I am afraid that the

chagrin at her brother's engagement which Jessie had not scrupled to express to him, had been partly the means of reconciling him to it so speedily.

"Ay, ay, Mistress Jessie!" he said to himself as he took down his overcoat the next morning preparatory to driving to Blackden, "ye're crawin' croose eneuch noo, I dootna; but bide a wee. Hoot awa!" as a button came off his wristband. "Weel, I've time eneuch to gang to Mrs. Elworthy and get it sewed on." For Jock, who was rather an unpunctual individual in a general way, and had often been too late for a train, or just in time to scramble into it as it began to move, had on this occasion got ready nearly half an hour before the time at which it was usual to start for the station.

"Here's a job for ye, Mrs. Elworthy!" he said, as he entered the housekeeper's room, holding out his long arm before him so as to display the gaping cuff—"if ye'll be so kind. It's none of your sewing on, or it wouldn't have dropped off."

Mrs. Elworthy smiled, not very cheerfully however, in acknowledgment of the compliment as she drew a handy little "housewife" from her pocket and prepared to begin operations, and Jock fancied he saw traces of tears upon her cheeks. "I hope ye're not in any trouble?" he said kindly. In his cut-and-dried way he had a great regard for the housekeeper; indeed it is probable that he liked her better, English woman though she was, than any of her sex—though that is not saying much.

"I ought not to make a trouble of it," she answered with a tearful little sniff, "but I can't help feeling rather cast down. I sha'n't sew on many more shirt buttons, Mr. Micklejohn, for you, or Mr. Lennox either." The last four words came out with a gulp.

"Ye're not going to leave? I thought ye had arranged to stay on."

"So I had, sir; and my dear master and his lady that is to be have both expressed the wish that I should do so, in the kindest way; but thinking it over, I've come to the conclusion that on the whole I'd rather leave altogether than remain under such altered circumstances—though of course I'll not go till Mrs. Nigel Lennox can suit herself with some one to take my place. You may say it's only a sentimental idea" ("Not at all! I perfectly comprehend ye," said Jock, who could do so all the better that this was the one subject on which he had ever been sentimental); "but after having had the sole charge and responsibility of dear Mr. Lennox's comfort for so long, I feel——" here the good woman broke off with a sob.

"Ay, ay; I see, I see!" said the secretary, still more warmly.

"Thank you, Mr. Micklejohn, it's a comfort to me that you do," answered the housekeeper, as she wound her thread round and round the neck of the button, and then fastened and cut it off.

"There, sir, you won't find that come off again in a hurry. Yes, some people may call it pride, and some might say——" and here Mrs. Elworthy blushed

and hesitated—"well, we all know the kind of designs that are generally set down to a single gentleman's housekeeper; but I can say truly that I've never cherished any feelings since I've been in this house other than those of a dutiful servant to the kindest and most considerate of masters."

"No one that knows you could ever suppose otherwise, Mrs. Elworthy," Jock assured her.

"And I thank God with all my heart for the great happiness He has been pleased to grant Mr. Lennox; but all the same, Mr. Micklejohn, it has come like a shock to me."

"Of course it has; I feel for ye, and I hope that ye'll be happy and comfortable wherever ye go next."

"Thank you, sir; but I'm not thinking of taking another situation. An uncle of mine died lately and left me a little money—just enough to make me independent for the rest of my days. Though for all that I would never have left dear Mr. Lennox's service, where I was so happy, while things went on in the old way. I should like to take a little house near London, and to make myself useful as I may find opportunity. Perhaps I could go down to St. Dorcas' and assist Mrs. Forsyth now and then—there must be work enough and to spare there for twenty willing hands. And there's one thing Mr. Lennox has promised me," she concluded, with a sudden accession of cheerfulness—"that is, if his wife doesn't object, as it's not likely she will,—I'm to continue to knit his stockings. He always said mine were the best he

ever wore—my dear master!" and the good lady grew tearful again.

While she had been speaking her companion had been carrying on a train of thought of his own, though it did not prevent him from taking in the sense of her words. It had suddenly struck him that there would be no special reason for his continuing to be an inmate of the house after Nigel's wedding; his companionship would be no longer of consequence to his friend, while his friend's wife would probably find him in her way—and he was very sure that she would be in his. Would it not be as well for him, like Mrs. Elworthy, to have a home of his own, and merely come to Nigel's for his secretarial duties? Indeed, for that matter, he began to think that he should not very strongly object were Nigel soon to look for a younger secretary, and leave him to settle down to a learned leisure. But he quailed at the thought—helpless, shiftless old bachelor that he was—of again taking upon himself the burden of domestic cares after the life of ease and comfort to which he had grown accustomed. Where would he be without Mrs. Elworthy to sew on his shirt-buttons, and doctor him when he was out of sorts, and see to the preparing of his favourite dishes? for Jock was very dependent on creature comforts, and a hundred times more dainty in the matter of eating and drinking than the millionaire himself. A possible solution of the difficulty flashed across his mind, to be first rejected, then reconsidered, and finally resolved upon as the best thing he could do under the circum-

stances. He pulled out his watch to ascertain what time he had left, and then drawing nearer to the housekeeper, he said in an unwontedly gentle tone, which made her look up through her tears with a start, "Dinna greet! It fashes me to see you, though yer tears do ye credit; for they tell of your warm, true heart, and your faithful attachment to my beloved and honoured friend. I want your attention for a meenit. I've been thinking, like yerself, that I'll not be staying here much longer now that circumstances are sae altered, and we might, if you're agreeable, come to an arrangement for our mutual convenience."

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Elworthy readily; "I'm sure I should be most happy to accommodate you in any way."

"Perhaps he wants me to take him as a lodger," she was thinking. "Well, I wouldn't mind; he'd feel quite lost among strangers, poor gentleman. I believe he's a good man at heart, with all his little fads and fancies; and I'm sure his love for dear Mr. Lennox is something beautiful."

"Now," continued Jock, "*I* know what *you* are, Mrs. Elworthy. I'm persuaded that if there's a woman anywhere capable of making a man comfortable and his home happy, you are that woman. And *you* know what *I* am. I'm not the rose, but I've lain near it; that is to say, I've been so long with Nigel that I humbly hope I've imbibed some portion of his spirit—at any rate I'm a wee bit less dour and dried-up than I would have been by myself, and if ye think ye could

content yourself as my wife"—Mr. Micklejohn paused a moment, and then concluded with a touch of dry humour—"I'll not interfere with your knitting Nigel's stockings or any other works of charity ye may be pleased to undertake."

The housekeeper had looked first astounded and then bashful as his meaning began to dawn upon her; and now raising her handkerchief to her face, at once to dry her tears and to hide her blushes, she said, "I'm sure, sir, if you really think I could make you happy, I would—but you forget, Mr. Micklejohn," she broke off suddenly, "the great difference in our positions. You are a gentleman, sir, and I am only a servant."

"Buff and nonsense!" returned Jock, with a touch of his patron's heartiness. "What does that matter if I'm satisfied? As far as that goes I've no doubt that your forebears were of gentler blood than mine, or than his that you're servant to."

Mrs. Elworthy's scruples were not very difficult to set at rest, and Jock parted from her in excellent spirits, whistling "*And are ye sure the news is true?*" on his way through the Castle. "I'll no repent this morning's wark," he soliloquised, by way of excusing himself to himself for the step he had taken. "If I'm to live my lane I'll need somebody to take care of me, and I don't believe I'd find one who'd do it better in all Her Majesty's dominions. She's a downright good woman, and her faithful love to Nigel deserves a reward. She's not conspicuous for intellect, but ye

canna get everything, and when a man's beginning to gang doon the hill it's of mair consequence to him to hae a wife that will keep things snod and cosy about him and see to his meals being punctual and well cooked than to get ane that could discuss the dooble authorship of Homer in all its bearings; after all, a woman's mind at its highest level is no match for a man's. And as far as appearances go, she's a hantle winsomer, wi' her rosy cheeks and bonny brown hair, than that pale-faced sharger, Miss Hastings. Na, na, I cudna have done better for myself; she's as true as steel, and as good-tempered as Jessie Cheyne is dour. Glad I am that I'm not fettered to *her* now—greedy girnin' auld wife that she is! I wadna be in Rob Cheyne's place noo for something, *puir stock!*”*

“I've just been taking some advice you gave me a whilie syne,” he said to Nigel, who was standing on the doorstep as he came out.

“Eh, and what was that, man?” asked Mr. Lennox.

“Speer at Mrs. Elworthy,” was Jock's reply; and Nigel did speer, and was exceedingly well-pleased with the result of his interrogations, as was also Miss Hastings when the news was told her.

“I call this a delightful arrangement,” she remarked afterwards to Mrs. Lennox. “I have often longed to throw my arms round Mrs. Elworthy's neck and kiss her, for her devotion to Nigel, and now I can always treat her as a friend and an equal. And I'm glad poor Mr. Micklejohn has consoled himself, for I know

* Poor fellow.

he cherished a grudge against me for coming between him and his friend, and I was dreadfully sorry for him; I think I understood what he felt better than Nigel himself did."

With regard to the high-contracting parties themselves it may as well be here mentioned that the wooing so unromantically begun had its issue in a great deal of solid happiness on both sides. Many of Jock's peculiarities toned down under the influence of his amiable and sensible wife, and to those which had become too much a part of his nature to be altered she was judiciously blind; and though they had at first joined their lots by way of mutual consolation for the loss of Nigel, a time came when neither of them would on any account have exchanged their present life of conjugal felicity for their former one of single blessedness in his service.

Mrs. Cheyne received her old flame with unusual friendliness, and even went so far as to press hospitality upon him in the shape of whiskey and home-made cake, which however he declined, feeling that to accept it would, in view of the disappointment he was about to inflict, be to add injury to insult. "Will wull have brought ye some news yestreen?" he remarked as he took his seat in Robert's arm-chair. The master of the house was busy upon the farm, and Will had gone somewhere for the day, so he and Jessie had the parlour to themselves.

"That did he!" she answered with a knowing nod. "It's a true saying that man proposes and God dis-

poses. Weel, weel, I daresay between ourselves, Mr. Micklejohn, ye're no more sorry for this fa'-oot than I am."

"I see nothing specially to be sorry for," said Jock, who could not resist the temptation to play with his victim a little before he revealed the truth.

Mrs. Cheyne chuckled, as much as to say that that was just what she had expected. "And what had my fine lady to say for herself when Nigel brought her to book?" she inquired. "Did she attempt to deny it?"

"She denied nothing that had taken place," replied Mr. Micklejohn.

"It's weel she had that much honesty. And what's she gaun to be about neist?"

"She'll be about buskin' for her weddin' or lang, by the latest accoonts."

"Weel, she would have done well to be off with the auld love before she was on with the new," was Jessie's next observation. "A gey ill trick she has played Nigel, first to draw him on to mak' her the offer and syne to fling him aff like an auld shee;* it's eneuch to gie him a scunner at weemen for the rest o's days. And fat's the name of the happy mon she's to bless wi' her hand? That is to say if she doesna change her mind again before the day comes," she added satirically.

"What should it be but Nigel Lennox?" was Jock's rejoinder.

"*What?*" shrieked Jessie, turning suddenly pale.

* Shoe.

"Do ye mean that Nigel's willin' to wed her after a' that's come and gone? Why, Will saw her wi' his ain eyes almost in the mon's arms, and ye say yerself that she didna deny it!"

"Ou, that was all a mistak' aboot what Will saw in the Birken Glen. That is to say, it *was* her auld jo,* and nae ither, that was with her there, but he came na by her wish. He's a mean tyke that broke his troth wi' her when she was a penniless lass, and thought he had but to haud up his little finger to get her back noo that she has a bit tocher—she just sent him aboot his business. Sae we'll dance at Nigel's weddin' after a', and if ye'll gie me the honour——"

The speaker stopped short in the midst of his little joke, for to his horror he perceived that his companion had sunk back in her chair apparently lifeless—for the first time in his existence he found himself alone with an unconscious female. Between fright and remorse, for he was convinced that she had been overcome by the chagrin his news had caused, he completely lost his wits, and stood gazing at her in a helpless way that went far to justify the poor woman's oft-repeated aphorism that men were menseless bodies. In his bewilderment it never occurred to him to ring the bell or call Baubie, and how long things would have remained at this stage is uncertain had not some kitchen dilemma brought that young person upon the scene unsummoned. Baubie, however she might in a general way deserve the character given her by her

* Sweetheart,

mistress of an "idle cuttie," could always rise to the occasion in sudden emergencies ; she took the command of affairs at once, and ordered Mr. Micklejohn about like a child, first directing him how to assist her various efforts to restore her mistress from the fainting-fit into which the girl supposed she had fallen, and when these proved unavailing despatching him to Murkleton for the doctor, bidding him, if he met a laddie on the way, send him across the fields for Mr. Cheyne.

Jock, who had obeyed her in everything most meekly, feeling only too thankful to be rid of the burden of responsibility, set off on his long legs at flying strides, and soon reached his destination, after making the one mistake of knocking at the first door with a brass plate that he came to, which proved not to be the doctor's, as he had taken for granted, but Miss Rottie's school for young ladies. Happily Dr. Begbie's was only a few steps beyond, and he himself was at home and able to return at once with Mr. Micklejohn to the Mains, where his patient was by that time laid on the bed in the spare bedroom on the ground floor. He pronounced her to be suffering from a stroke of paralysis, which might have been accelerated by mental agitation, though it had probably been coming on for some time, a verdict which somewhat relieved her visitor, who had frankly confessed to the medical man his own imagined share in the misfortune, and who often reproached himself afterwards for the glee with which he had set about annihilating her satisfaction, selfish though the latter was.

Jessie's recovery was a slow and tedious affair; Nigel's wedding had come and gone before she was able to lift her head from her pillow—had she been in any real danger of course he would have put it off—and many months elapsed ere she regained even a measure of her former health and strength. Her illness, however, furnished a fresh illustration of the proverb she had quoted so gleefully just before it overtook her—"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." What seemed to her and her family a grievous visitation turned out a blessing for them all, since it left her a gentler, humbler and altogether better woman than it found her. She was sitting up in bed one mild day in early spring, reading for the second time a letter she had received that morning bearing the *Firenze* postmark, when the sound of wheels stopping at the gate fell on her ear, followed shortly afterwards by an unusual amount of noise and bustle—strange voices and heavy footsteps. She was about to ring her little hand-bell for Baubie when that domestic suddenly put her head into the room with an ill-concealed grin upon her face, and then flung the door open to admit two of the Castle men-servants bearing between them Robert Cheyne's elbow-chair with old Mrs. Lennox seated in it. Jessie uttered one cry, as they set down their burden by the bedside and retired, and then raising herself with a sudden effort she fell upon the old lady's neck, and mother and daughter wept together. "Eh! mither, what's brought ye here?" she exclaimed at last.

"Just the brougham!" answered Mrs. Lennox

cheerily, "and Christian of course cam' with me ; I've sent her to have a crack wi' Baubie in the kitchen."

"But you that havena been downstairs for years, mother ! Ye'll just catch your death, and then what will Nigel say ? "

"Not Nigel himself should forbid my visiting my ain bairn in her affliction, the first time it was any way possible to me !" replied the old lady. "Nor would he forbye. I had a letter from him yestreen full of expressions of concern about ye, both from himself and Agatha."

"Eh, but I've just had one from Agatha herself !" rejoined Jessie, "and I'm sure if I'd been her own sister she couldna have written more affectionately. It irks me to think hoo bitter I was against her at first. I'm so thankful that Janet never saw the account I sent her of that affair wi' the artist, as Will brought it home ; it was just the maist providential thing ! She was sitting reading my letter wi' wee Bobbie on her knee before the fire, and the bairn in a fit o' mischief twitched the second sheet wi' the postscript oot o' her hand and flung it into the flames. She was gey fashed aboot it, but I was never mair thankful for onything in my life."

"The Lord's aye better to us than we deserve, my dear !" answered her mother.

"Yes, indeed ; it's wonderful how many mercies He's vouchsafed to me just now—and your coming, mother, is the crown of a' ! Won't Daisy be pleased when she gets back from school, and Robert when

he comes in to dinner!" and Mrs. Cheyne's tears began to flow afresh.

"Whisht! whisht! my dear," said Mrs. Lennox soothingly; yet there was some satisfaction in the look she turned towards her daughter's face—it was so much less hard and forbidding than of old.

"And to think how kind they've all been to me!" Jessie went on. "Puir Rob has just waited on me hand and foot. I wish I may never say another ill word to him as long as I live! and there was Janet sendin' me warm wraps and a' kin' of comforts from Dundee, and Robina wantin' to leave her situation to come and nurse me—of course I wadna hear of that—and Daisy has been like a little angel to me. I'm glad she's to be rewarded; Nigel and Agatha want her to come and bide with them in London after Easter and attend a High School, and the bairn is wild with joy at the thought o't, though she says she willna leave me unless I'm well enough to spare her—but I'll be that or then, please God. And only think of poor Baubie too! She was to have left, ye know, at the term, to marry yon baker at Glasgie, but when my trouble came she refused to leave me till I was able to get about again. I was tellin' her the other day 'twas a pity she didna tak' him when she could get him, for he micht get tired of waitin' for her; and gin she pit him aff hersel' she couldna weel bring an action for loss of market, but she said, 'Gin he canna bide for me till I nurse my sick mistress he may e'en gang his ways.' And she wanted, when I was

first stricken, to tend me and do the housework too ; she said she was sure nothing would keep me from recovering sae much as to think there was needless spendin' o' money gangin' on ; but of course Rob wadna consent to that ; he had in a woman frae the toon to help her, and quite right too. I wad never have gien her credit for sae much gude feelin', puir lassie ! I canna but like her for't, though she used to be gey impident."

"Isn't that the picture Nigel gave Daisy, hanging on the wall there ?" asked Mrs. Lennox, after a little more conversation on domestic matters.

"Yes, she hung it there a whilie back ; she thought it wad be nice for me to look at as I lie in bed. I didna care much for it once, but I wouldna like it awa noo—it puts me in mind of things I've thought too little o'. You used to tell me, mother, that I was owre fond of this warld's gear."

"I doot there's no need to tell ye that noo, my dear lassie," said the old lady. "It's weel if your affliction has taught ye to prize the other world's gear."

"I hope it has, mother," Jessie answered humbly. "The young minister that's supplying the pulpit while Mr. Strahan is away came to see me on Monday—a nice douce, gentle young man he is—and he was saying how many ill weeds there are that keep our hearts shut against the Lord, like thae dockans and bram'les—the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches that choke the Word. He little kent hoo applicable

his words were to my case. I've got two verses of a hymn written out here," she continued, drawing a slip of paper from between the pages of her Bible which lay on her bed, "that Daisy's going to illuminate for me on a large card to hang on the wall. I've often heard Nigel sing them, but the prayer they contain is more befitting to me than to him—

“ ‘ O grant us grace to rise above
The glare of this world's smelting fires ;
Let God's great love put out the love
Of gold and gain and low desires.

“ ‘ Teach us to heed the Gospel strain
Telling of wealth that knows no rust ;
The love of Christ is more than gain
And heavenly crowns than yellow dust.' ”

And old Mrs. Lennox said solemnly, “ Amen ! ”

CHAPTER XXIX.

AGATHOS.

"I CAN'T think what has come over Blanche!" remarked Mrs. Langhorne to her husband one summer evening, about two years after Agatha's marriage; they were sitting together on the garden-seat outside the library window at Maple Bank, the gentleman smoking a cigar and the lady busy with some fancy knitting.

"How do you mean? What's the matter with her?" he asked.

"Is it possible you haven't noticed how changed she is? But that is just like men; they never observe anything!"

"She seems to have taken rather a religious turn lately," remarked Mr. Langhorne, "if that's what you complain of."

"I don't complain of that, of course, as long as it's not carried to fanaticism," answered his wife somewhat impatiently. "I am perfectly willing for her to teach in the Sunday-school, and attend the week-night service, as long as Fox doesn't mind accompanying her; it's very good of him, I'm sure, dear fellow, but he

always was so unselfish, and so fond of Blanchie! No, what vexes me is that she doesn't seem to enter into the innocent amusements and pleasures of life as she used to do. It isn't natural in a young girl."

"Perhaps she's in love," suggested her husband.

"Well, I was thinking whether Bertrand Puttick's long absence from home might not have had something to do with it. But now that he has returned and is evidently disposed to be as attentive as ever, I hope we shall see a change in her. You know Lady Puttick has asked her to go there for a fortnight, and I am very glad of it, for it will do her good and brighten her up to be among them all at Daynscot. And perhaps she and Bertrand may come to an understanding."

"When did you first perceive this alteration in her?" asked Richard Langhorne.

"Soon after that long visit she paid to the Lennoxes. It's extraordinary how much more influence Agatha seems to have over her now than when she lived with us."

"Things have changed since then," said her husband. He himself felt far more respect for his sister-in-law as Mrs. Lennox of Glen Irvine than he had done for her as plain Agatha Hastings, and he thought it only natural that others should be animated by the same spirit.

"The case being altered, that alters the case," remarked Fox, leaning out of the window behind them. He had shot up into a tall manly fellow, not

handsome, but sensible and decided-looking. "But I don't wonder at anybody liking Aunt Agatha now," he went on; "she's ever so much jollier than she used to be. You should hear how she goes laughing and singing about the house—the magical effect of love, I suppose!"

"*Love!*" sneered his father. "I should have given you credit for more knowledge of the world, Fox, than to talk about love in the case of such a well-seasoned pair as your aunt and Nigel Lennox. At this date after marriage too!"

"Well, do you know," said Fox, with his old mock-sagacious air, "I believe it's the case that when old maids and grey beards pair off together, they generally go in for mutual convenience without reference to the sentimental, but Uncle Nigel and Aunt Agatha must be the exception that proves the rule. I don't mean that they're always spooning, but you can see with half an eye that it's a case of mutual adoration."

Mr. Langhorne uttered a contemptuous grunt. He had never believed that the union in question had been anything but an act of worldly policy on both sides. "That's all rubbish!" he had coarsely declared one day when his wife had remarked that Agatha really seemed sentimental about the old gentleman; "she wanted a rich husband, and he wanted an educated wife, that was all!"

"I only hope," resumed Fox, "that *my* lady-love, when I get one, may be half as much wrapped up in me

as the Queen of Bricks and Mortar is in her royal consort."

"You rise to success in life as he has done, and there's no doubt but what she will," was his father's cynical rejoinder.

Fox looked as if he could have retorted, but thought better of it, and getting out of the window in his old unceremonious fashion he went for a stroll round the garden, lingering by Blanche's pet rose-tree to take note of a bud that gave promise of being a lovely half-blown rose on the morrow; he meant to beg it from her for a Crook's Peak lad who was in the hospital with a fractured thigh, and he felt pretty sure that his request would be granted.

"Has Bertrand spoken?" This was Mrs. Langhorne's first thought on her daughter's return from Daynscot, and she watched the girl narrowly, trying to learn from her demeanour whether this consummation of her maternal wishes had been attained. But there was something about Blanche that puzzled her. She seemed nervous and excited, certainly, but it was not with the happy flutter of a newly-made *fiancée*. Her mother felt uneasy, and following her to her room after dinner she soon succeeded in eliciting from her the fact that Sir Samuel Puttick's son and heir had made her an offer the day before and that she had refused him.

Mrs. Langhorne was thunderstruck. "*Blanche!* Are you mad? Do you mean to say that you have refused poor Bertrand, who has loved you all his life?

And such a splendid settlement for you" (the poor lady's accents grew quite pathetic as the glories of Daynscot rose before her). "Why, there isn't a girl for miles round but would give her little finger to get him! You needn't expect that he'll ask you a second time; you may think it a great compliment that he has done so once. Why, I heard the other day that Lady Julia Fotheringham was doing all she could to fascinate him, and they say the Earl would like nothing better! What *were* you thinking of, child?"

"Mother, I could never marry Bertrand. He's very nice, and I'm sorry to disappoint him, but I feel that I could not look up to him; that he would never raise me above myself or help me in the sort of life I want to lead; he cares for nothing but billiards and shooting and horse-racing, and things of that sort."

"Are you so ignorant of the world, Blanche, as not to know that those are the tastes of all country gentlemen? One would think they were vices, to hear you talk. I know no young man with whose character Bertrand Puttick's will not bear favourable comparison."

"I do—one, at any rate," escaped from Blanche almost involuntarily. The next moment she hung her head with a conscious air that her mother did not fail to notice.

"Now we are coming to it!" she thought. "And who may he be?" she inquired in a milder tone.

Her daughter did not answer.

"Come ! Blanche, tell me the name of your paragon."

"Malcolm Cheyne," Blanche said, without looking up.

"What, Nigel's nephew, the curate ? So it is he, is it, who has stolen away your heart from poor Bertrand ?"

"Oh ! mother, I didn't mean that," exclaimed the girl in confusion. "At least," and she blushed hotly—it was more than a skin-deep blush this time—"what I wanted to say was that it was seeing his earnest unselfish Christian life that first made me wish to be different myself from what I used to be ; and after knowing him I could never care for any one who lived up to a lower standard."

"My dear child, did you think I should be angry with you for caring for him ?"

"But indeed, mother, you are in a mistake if you think there was anything of that sort between us. He never spoke much to me at all,—and when he did it was only on ordinary subjects and once or twice about religion. His mind is entirely taken up with the duties of his office."

"Perhaps he is vowed to celibacy," suggested her mother.

"Oh ! dear, no ; he does not hold those opinions at all !" protested Blanche, and then she blushed more deeply than ever at her own vehemence.

"No ?" rejoined Mrs. Langhorne quietly, not seeming to notice her daughter's perturbation. "In that

case he is sure to take a helpmeet to himself sooner or later. Perhaps he has found one already among his district-visitors and Sunday-school teachers."

"Perhaps he has," responded the young lady, not very cheerfully.

"Well, well! We don't know what may be or may not be, do we, dear?" said the mother, drawing Blanche to her and kissing her. "I only know that I am very glad not to lose my little girl just yet. But dear me! I must not stay talking any longer, your father will wonder what has become of me," and Mrs. Langhorne swept off, turning round however in the doorway to say, "By-the-by, Blanche, Miss Parkes called yesterday; she wanted to know if you would like to give a Bible lesson on Thursday mornings to the little girls in her Orphanage. I refused for you, for I did not like the idea of your having a standing engagement every week, but I have been thinking since that if it would be a pleasure to you I wouldn't mind your undertaking it."

"Oh! thank you, mother; it is just what I should like!" exclaimed Blanche gratefully, and her mother went away smiling.

She found her husband as she expected on the garden-seat. He looked up as she approached, and taking his cigar from between his lips, asked, "Well, what have you found out from Blanche?"

"Something you will not be sorry to hear, I fancy," she answered, "only you must not say a word to her about it, or all will be spoilt. You were right about her being in love, but it is not with Bertrand Puttick,

and so she has given him to understand. It is Nigel's clerical nephew, Malcolm Cheyne."

"Ha! has *he* been making up to her? How is it she has kept so quiet about it all this time?"

"Hush! don't talk so loud. It is all on one side as yet, according to Blanche; indeed she didn't want to allow even that much, but I can see which way the wind lies. The *eldest* nephew, you know! Nigel, having no children of his own, will in all probability make him his heir." And Mrs. Langhorne's face positively beamed at the brilliant prospect for her daughter's future that rose before her mind's eye. To see Blanche married to the heir of Daynscot had hitherto been her highest ambition, but Daynscot was no more to be placed in the balance with Glen Irvine than Snowdon with Mont Blanc.

"H'm, well; we mustn't count our chickens before they are hatched," said her husband, though the same idea had occurred to himself. "In any case, Nigel is sure to leave him something handsome, and such a friend to the Church as he is will have no difficulty in getting the young fellow nominated to some good piece of preferment before long. If it's all on one side, however, nothing may come of it after all."

"Oh! I've no fears about that, if only they are thrown in each other's way again; no young man could help being charmed with a girl like our Blanche especially if he finds out how much she admires him. In fact I think it very likely he is smitten already, though he was too shy to let her know it. It will all

come right in the end, you'll see. I hope the Lennoxes will invite her again soon. In the meantime we must just let her go on in her own way, and I shall take care to keep Agatha well posted up in her doings."

"So that was at the bottom of Miss Blanche's religious turn, hey?" laughed Richard Langhorne. "Well, if the two young folks like to settle it between themselves, I for one shall have no objection. I can hardly fancy our Blanche a parson's wife, though."

"I must say I wonder what she saw in him to attract her so much," said his wife. "I call him decidedly plain, and he has no manner; he's dreadfully *gauche* and retiring in society. Agatha says he's a deep thinker; like the learned parrot, I suppose, who never talked, but thought all the more."

"He struck me as just a decent sort of fellow who would do for the Church if for nothing else," rejoined Richard. "That next brother of his now, William, I should say had a great deal more in him. I prophesy he'll make his way in the world as his uncle has done."

"I fancy though that Mac, as they call him, will make the best husband of the two," said Mrs. Langhorne. "I have heard Agatha say that he has a good deal of Nigel's disposition. But here comes the child herself. Hush!"

After all Mrs. Langhorne was not far wrong in her conjecture that the Rev. Malcolm Cheyne was less indifferent to her daughter's attractions than that young lady modestly supposed, and in the course of time

the two came to an understanding on the subject as satisfactory to themselves as it was to their friends and relatives, and golden-haired Blanche became eventually the sunshine of a suburban parsonage, attached to a recently-built district church in the midst of a new and increasingly populous neighbourhood, where if there was enough fresh air to satisfy Mrs. Cheyne there was also enough of hard work to content her brother. Blanche has developed into a good and efficient little parsoness, and may even in time, if she goes on as she has begun, attain to Agatha Lennox's lofty ideal of what a clergyman's wife should be. In the meantime aunt and niece are excellent friends, and Malcolm and Blanche and the bairns who are springing up round them pay a long visit to Glen Irvine Castle every year. The sound of their pattering feet and blithe young voices is a delight to Nigel and Agatha, and the little ones are all passionately fond of their great-aunt, who, however much pre-occupied she may be with guests or literary work, always makes time to romp with them and tell them tales; but her special favourite and devoted little lover is the eldest boy, a sturdy yellow-haired laddie, who when asked his name, replies with an air of some consequence, "Agathos Lennox Cheyne." The first name, by which he is always called, was, as may be guessed, the choice and ordinance of the laird of Glen Irvine, to whom the selection was offered, and who held by it firmly, in spite of his wife's entreaty that his own might be substituted, or at least super-

added. Mrs. Langhorne declared to her husband that after saddling the child with such a ridiculous appellation Nigel could not well do less than leave him a fortune to support it with, but Blanche thought it pretty and suggestive, and Malcolm was well-pleased that his firstborn should bear the name, as nearly as might be, of his new aunt, to whom he had become scarcely less warmly attached than was his sister Daisy.

For once, some months before his ordination, Mac had, through the influence of an agnostic friend, been very near making shipwreck of his faith, and would probably have done so altogether but for the patience, kindness, and exhaustiveness with which Agatha, who was thoroughly well up in the subject of Christian evidences, had entered into the difficulties he confided to her, throwing them out at first tentatively as the suggestions of another, but afterwards, when he found how far she was from harshly condemning any honest doubt, admitting that they were troubling his own peace—till with God's blessing he was enabled to vanquish these his ghostly enemies, and rest trustfully as a child in the faith of his fathers. None but herself knew of the crisis at the time, for Malcolm had begged her not to mention the confession he had made to her—at any rate until his opinions should be settled one way or another—even to his uncle. "His own faith is so bright and simple, as would to God mine were now!" he said, "that he would think these problems that beset me simply monstrous; he could not enter

into them as you do. It will be time enough to tell him if I find that I cannot honestly go up for ordination."

So Agatha held her peace, and the first intimation Nigel had of the struggle through which his nephew had passed was in a letter which the young clergyman wrote to him soon after he was settled in his first curacy, in which, after thanking his uncle heartily for all that he had done for him, he alluded to the endless debt of gratitude he owed to his aunt for the assistance she had afforded him in a season of darkness and uncertainty—a sentence which puzzled Mr. Lennox till he had read the letter to his wife, and heard her explanation of the matter, after which his delight and thankfulness were unbounded. He could not resist telling all to his brother-in-law, who happened to be with them at the time, and Agatha felt doubly rewarded when old Robert Cheyne in a transport of joy and gratitude hurried across the room towards her, the tears streaming down his furrowed cheeks (Nigel all the while looking on with face aglow and eyes suspiciously moist), and fairly hugged and kissed her, ejaculating at the same time in a voice trembling with emotion, "The Lord for ever bless ye!"

Those who profess to be well-informed, speak of little Agathos as the probable owner of Glen Irvine, when that time comes, which all who know Nigel Lennox even by report devoutly hope may still be far distant. But, however that may be, it has been the unceasing prayer of his great-aunt and godmother,

ever since the day when she held him in her arms at the font, that he may inherit the pure and spotless fame and open childlike heart which are far greater and nobler gifts than even the princely fortune of his uncle Nigel.

THE END.

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